

CEREBUS

DAVE SIM
CEREBUS



DAVE SIM

CEREBUS
BOOK
1
AARDVARK
VANAHHEIM
INC.



aardvark-vanaheim inc

cerebus * cerebus archive * glamourpuss * cerebus tv * simteevee

fax transmission

from Dave Sim at fax no.

to the attention of: Anyone reading
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CEREBUS trade

(I don't have e-mail and can only be contacted
by escargot mail at Box 1674 Stn. C Kitchener
Ontario, CANADA N2G 4R2)

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Sincere thanks to everyone who has devoted that most valuable of human commodities -- their time -- to reading my and Gerhard's work.

Dave Sim, creator, writer, co-artist

Gerhard does prints and commissions and can be contacted at gerhardart.com

CEREBUS

by

Dave Sim

PRINTED IN CANADA

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Dedication:

to the memory of Gene Day
and to Michael, Karen, Deni, Bob
and Eric because they were there
at the beginning.

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Introduction:

These are the first adventures of Cerebus the Aardvark which I began in the pages of his comic book in December of 1977. Although crude, I hope the dedication of a rookie taking his first tentative steps unburdened by editorial interference still shows through. It was a wonderful time. And my hair was much longer.

Dave Sim
Kitchener, Ontario
July 29, 1987

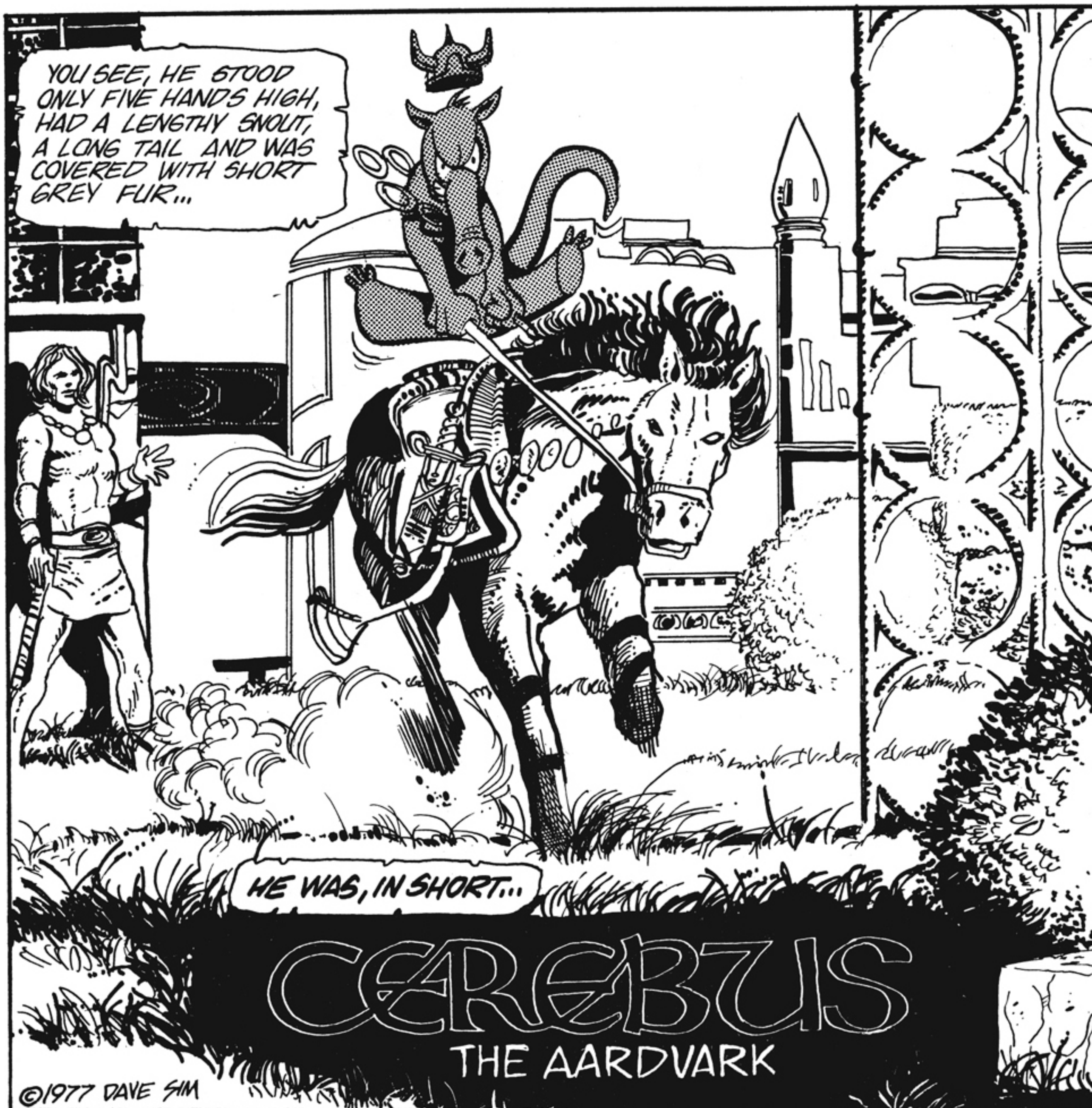
HE CAME TO OUR CITY
IN THE EARLY DAWN...



THOUGH LATER HE WOULD
BE CALLED THE FINEST
WARRIOR TO ENTER OUR
GATES, AT THE TIME, HE
WAS BUT A **CURIOSITY...**



YOU SEE, HE STOOD
ONLY FIVE HANDS HIGH,
HAD A LENGTHY SNOUT,
A LONG TAIL AND WAS
COVERED WITH SHORT
GREY FUR...



HE WAS, IN SHORT...

CEREBUS

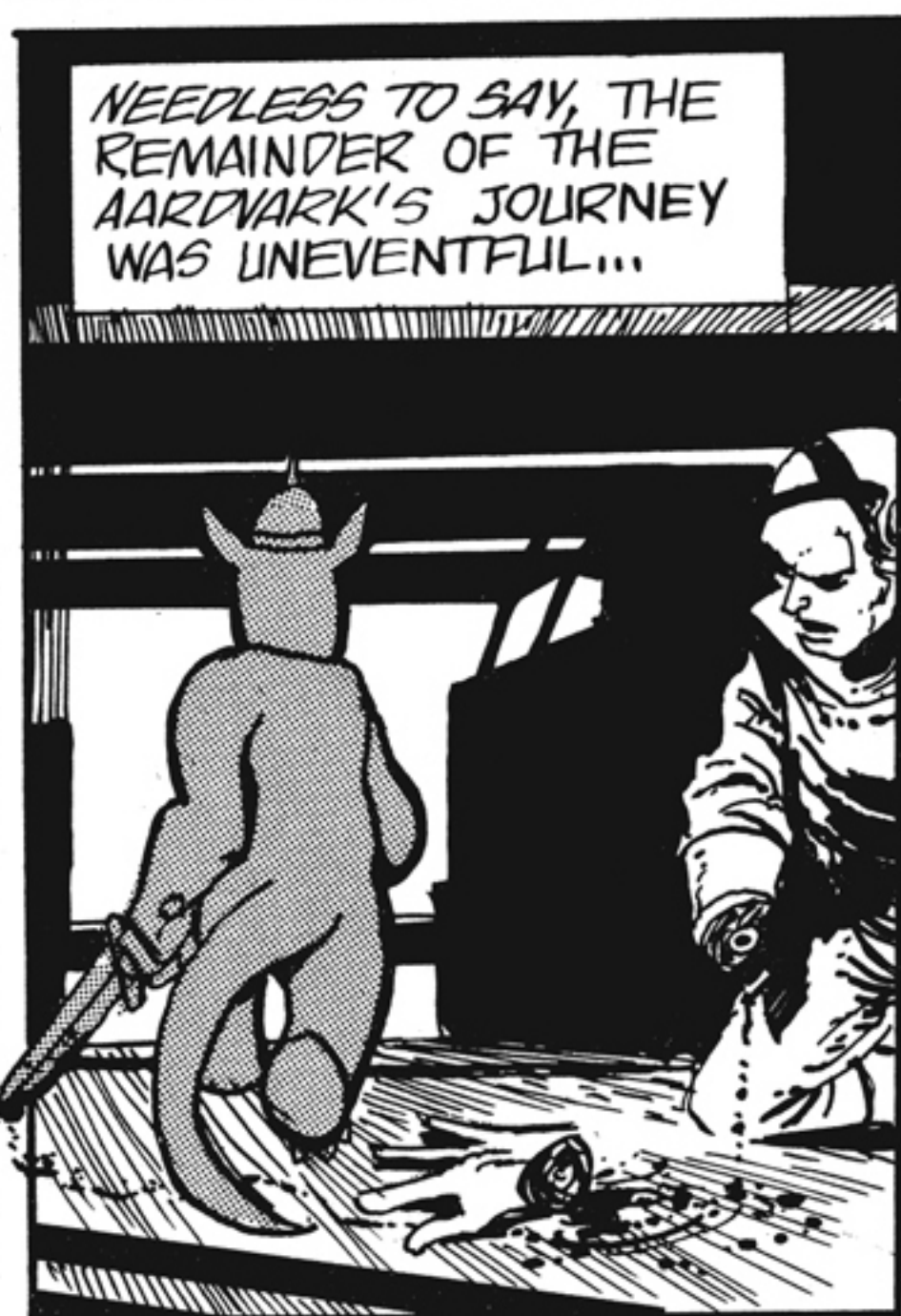
THE AARDVARK

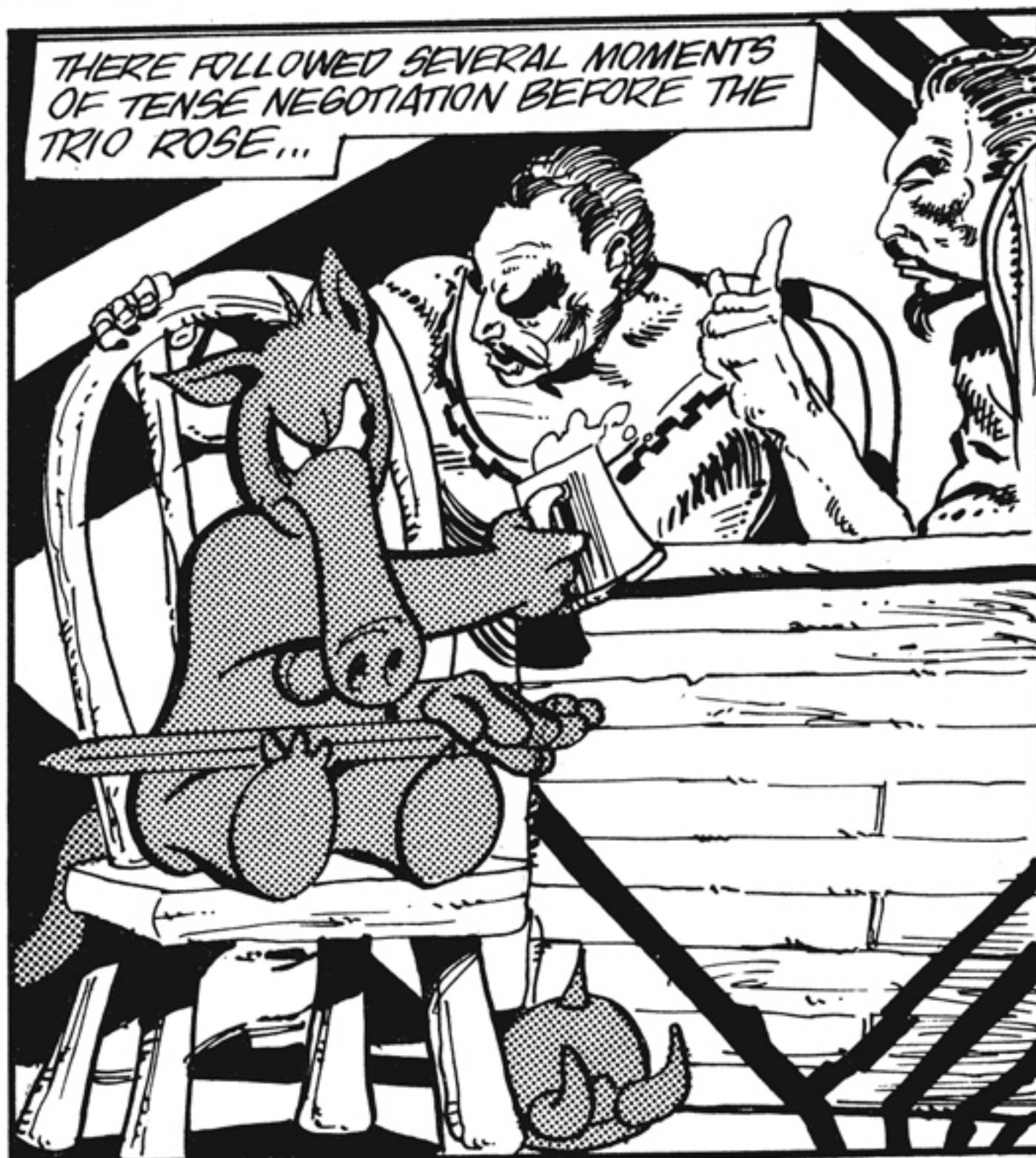
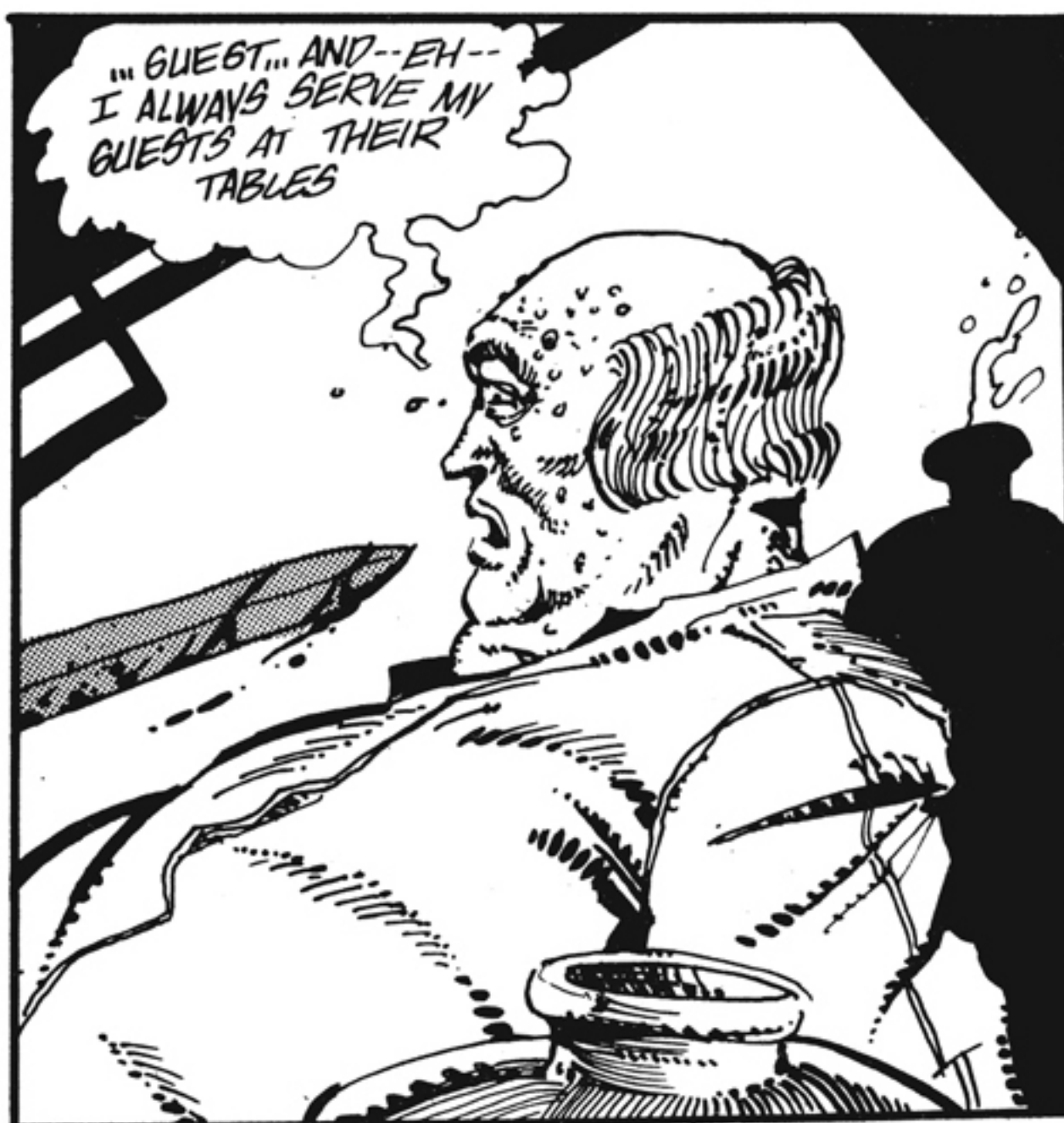


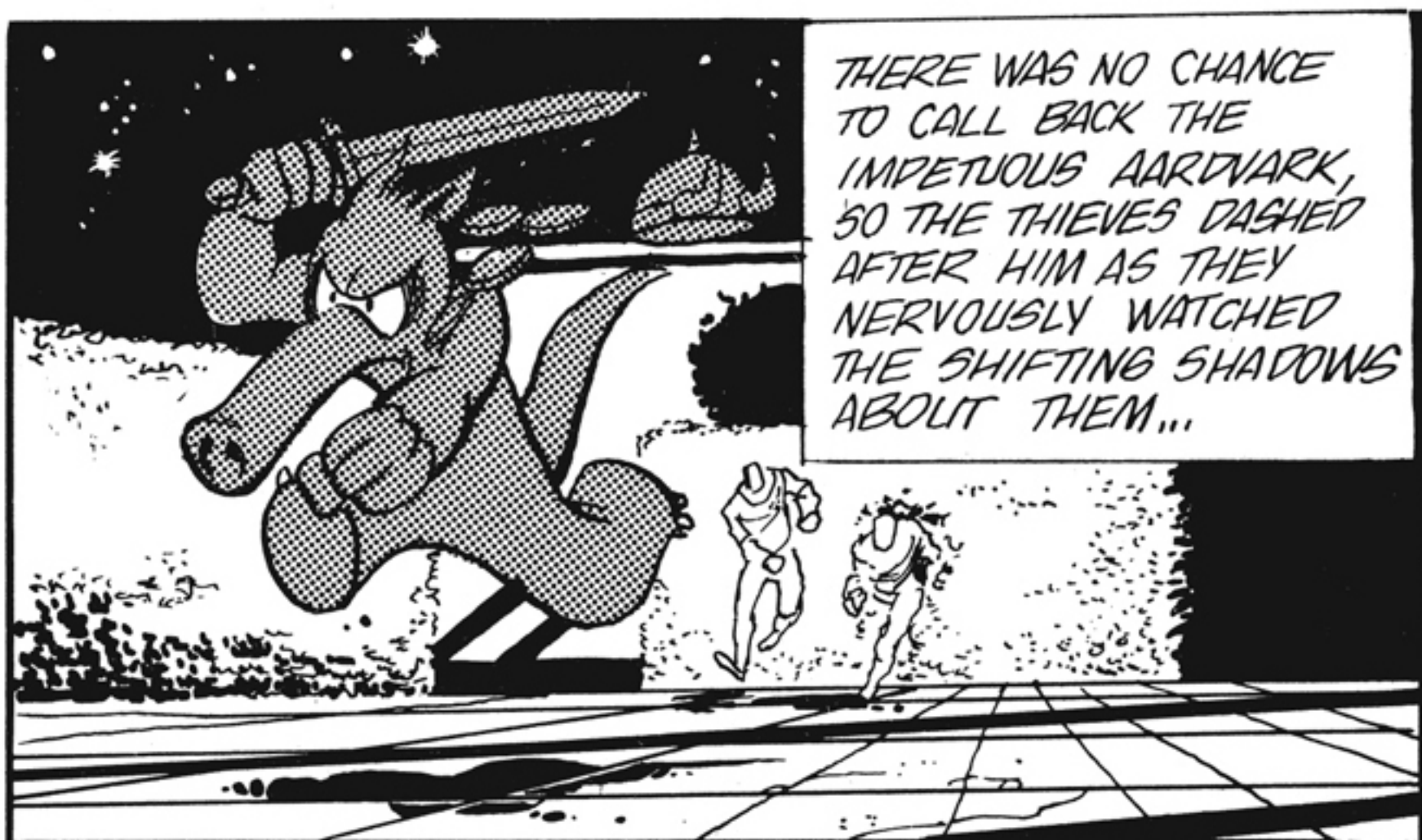
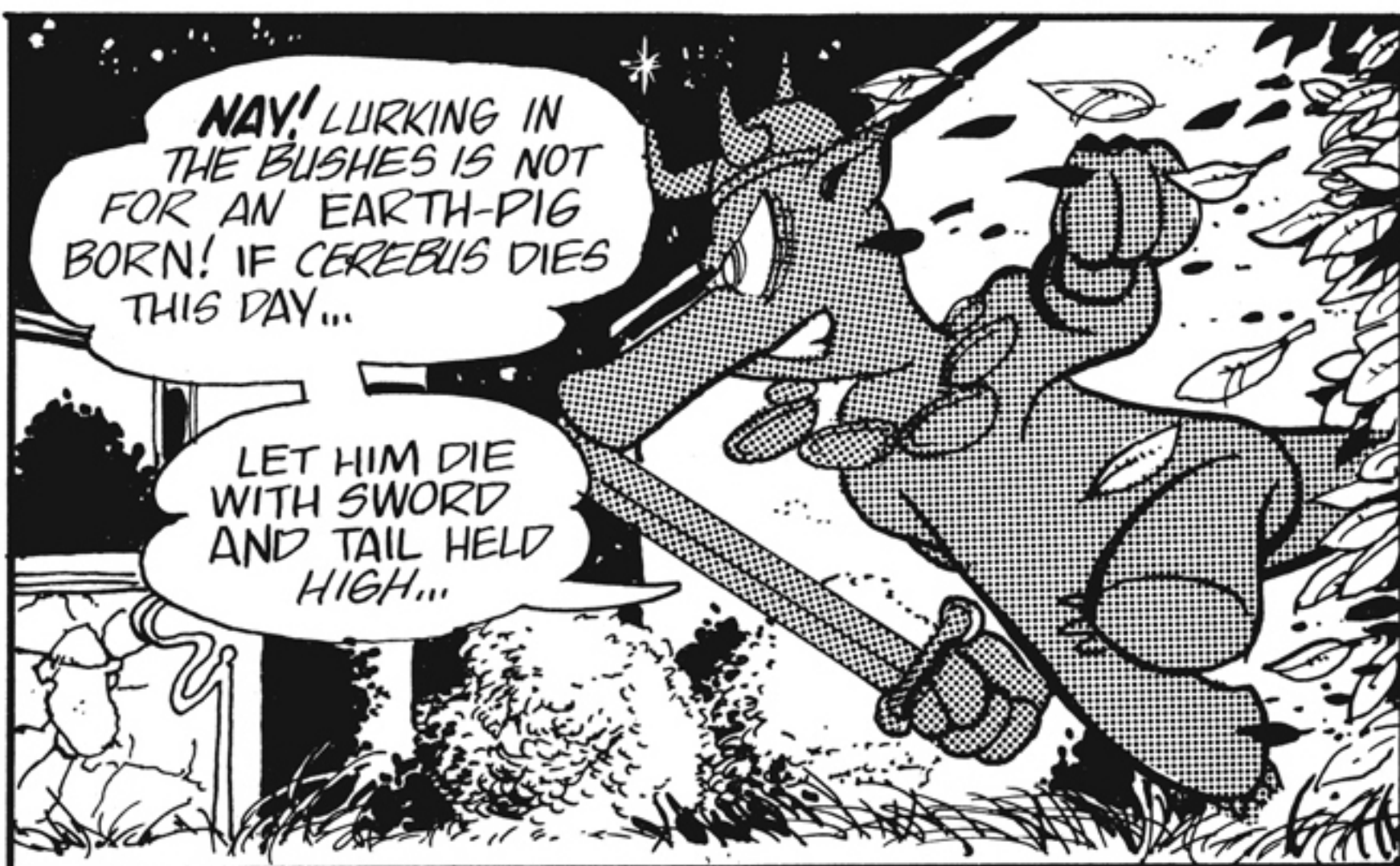
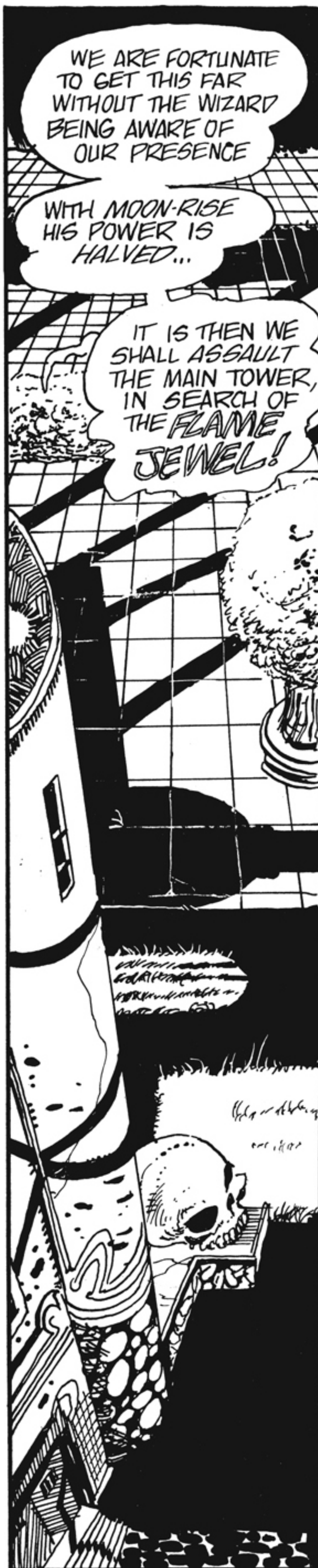
THE TAVERN! WHERE A MAN (OR AARDVARK) IS MEASURED BY HIS ABILITY TO REACH THE BAR **UNSCATHED**...

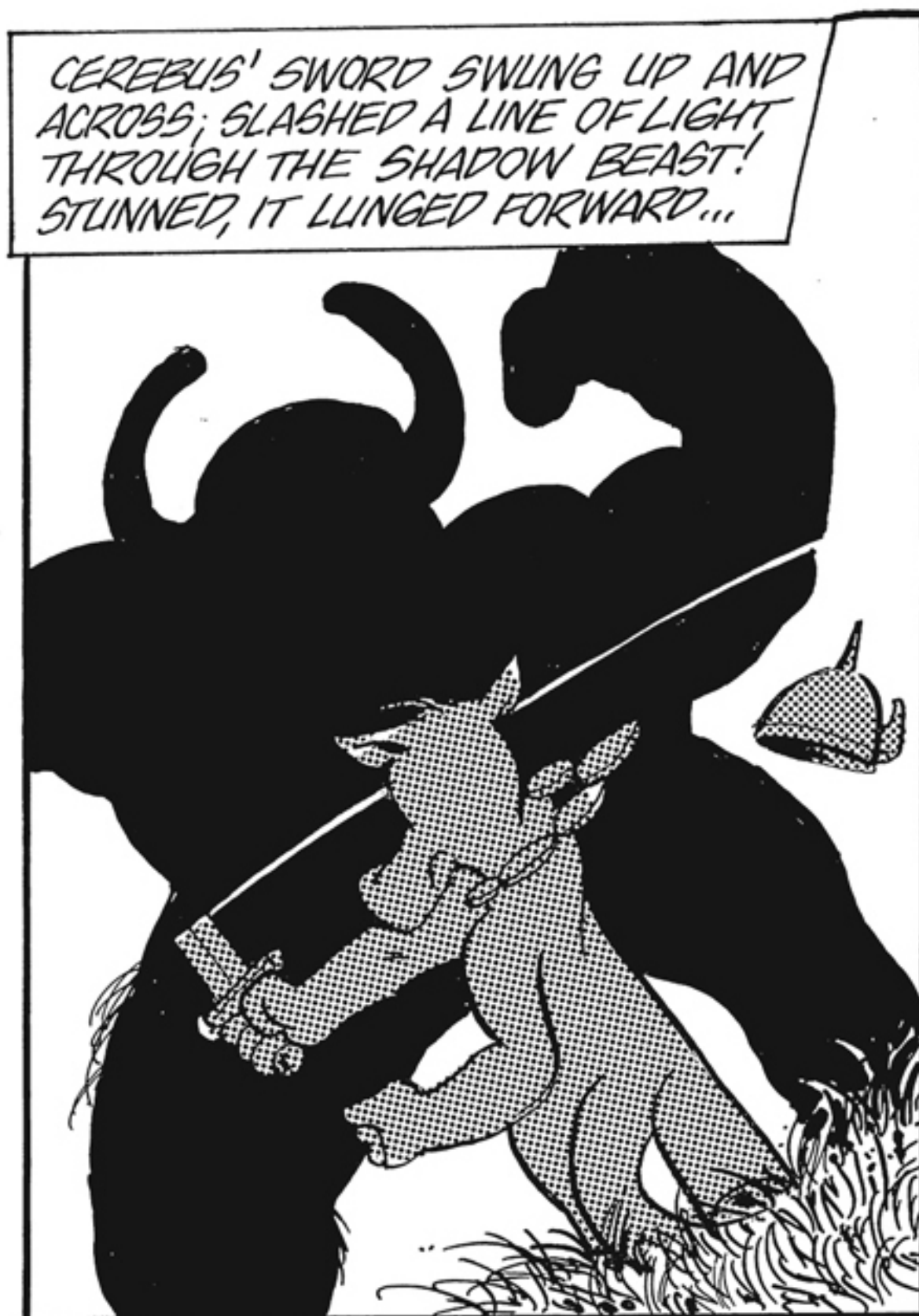
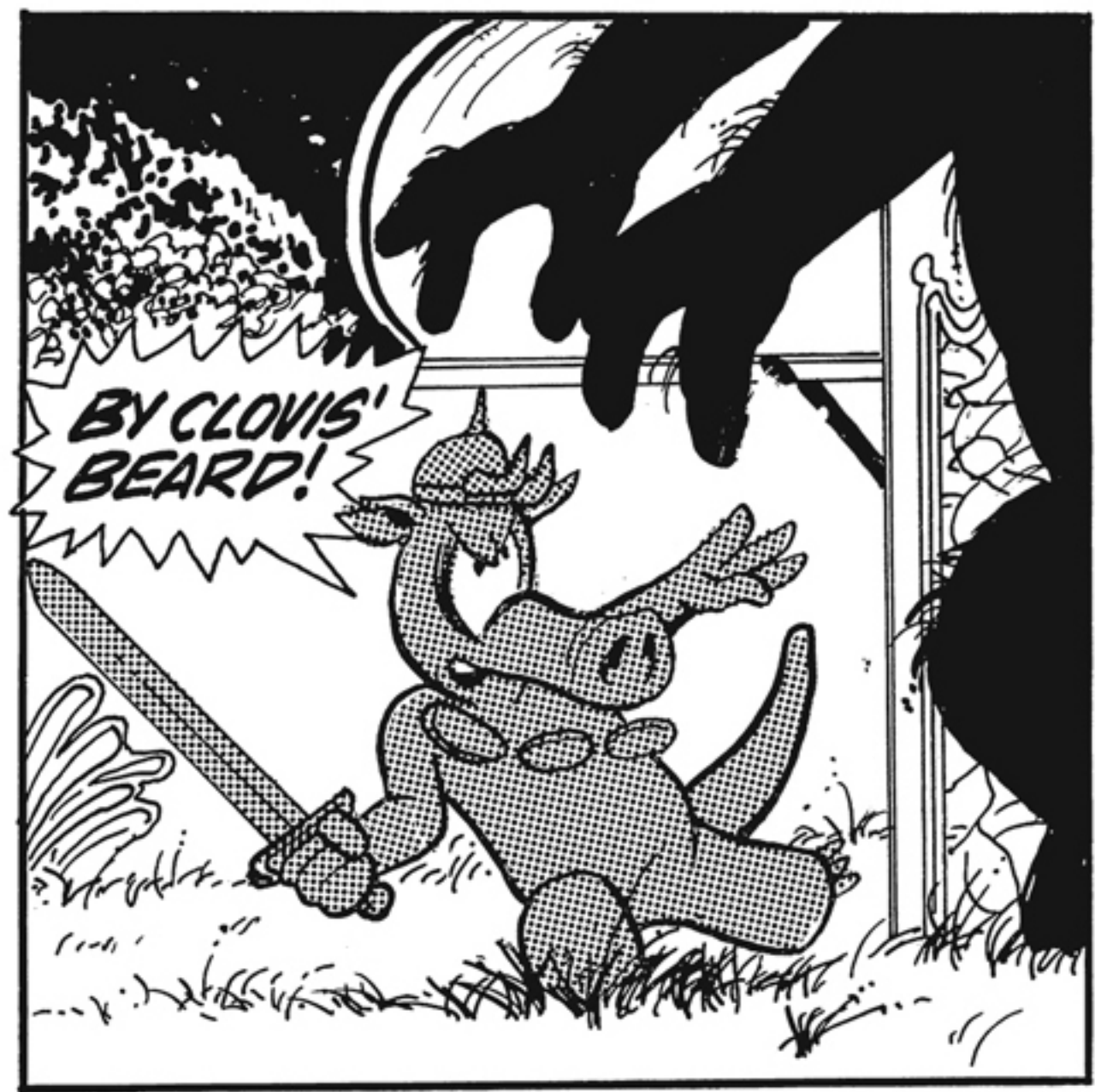


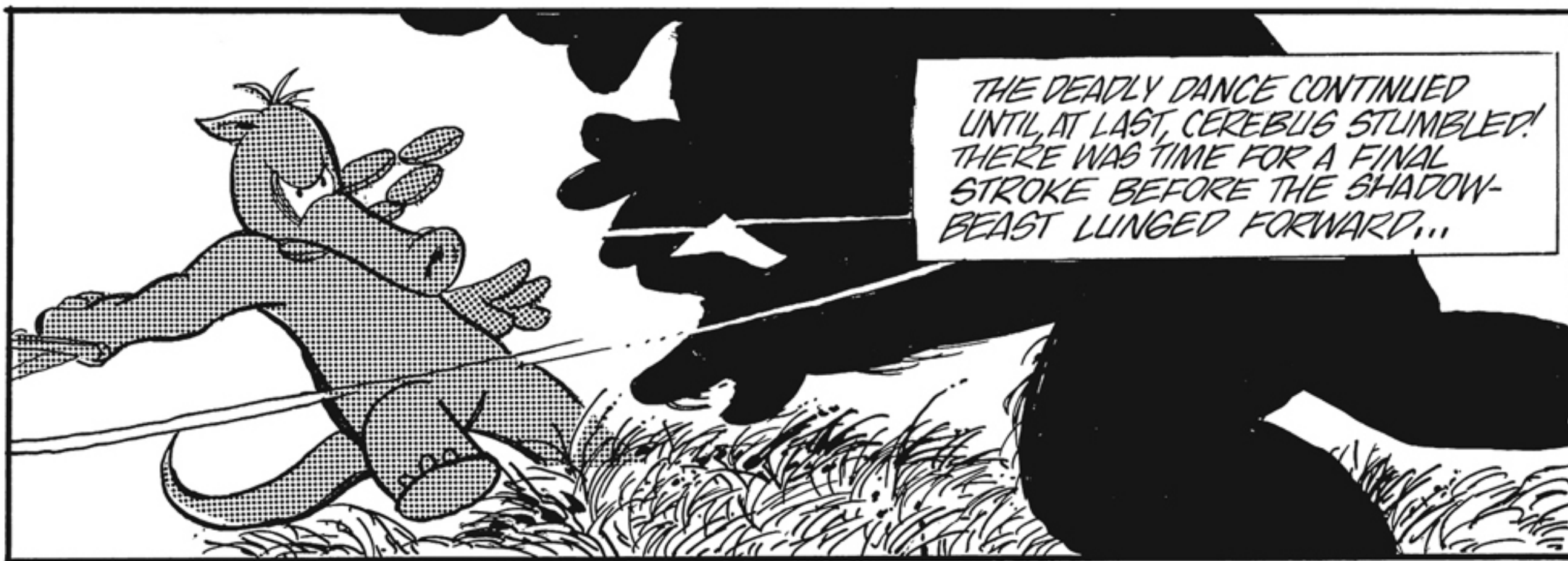
HACK











THE DEADLY DANCE CONTINUED UNTIL, AT LAST, CEREBUG STUMBLER! THERE WAS TIME FOR A FINAL STROKE BEFORE THE SHADOW-BEAST LUNGED FORWARD...



AND **DIED**, BECOMING, IN THE PROCESS, JUST ANOTHER SHADOW...



WE HAVE CHOSEN OUR WARRIOR WELL, MY BROTHER-- HE SEEMS TOTALLY WITHOUT FEAR OF SORCERY...

...OR ANYTHING ELSE!



ARE YOU **INJURED**, MY FRIEND? ...PERHAPS WE SHOULD WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE...



CEREBUG WILL SURVIVE... THE WIZARD AWAITS US, THOUGH, AND OUR ONLY HOPE IS TO ATTACK HIM...

BEFORE HE ATTACKS US!



THEY PASSED THROUGH SEEMINGLY ENDLESS
STONE CORRIDORS IN SEARCH OF THE
WIZARD AND HIS FLAME JEWEL...



I LIKE THIS NOT ONE
BIT! I FEAR, **CEREBUS**,
THAT THESE SKELETONS
ARE A BAD OMEN...!

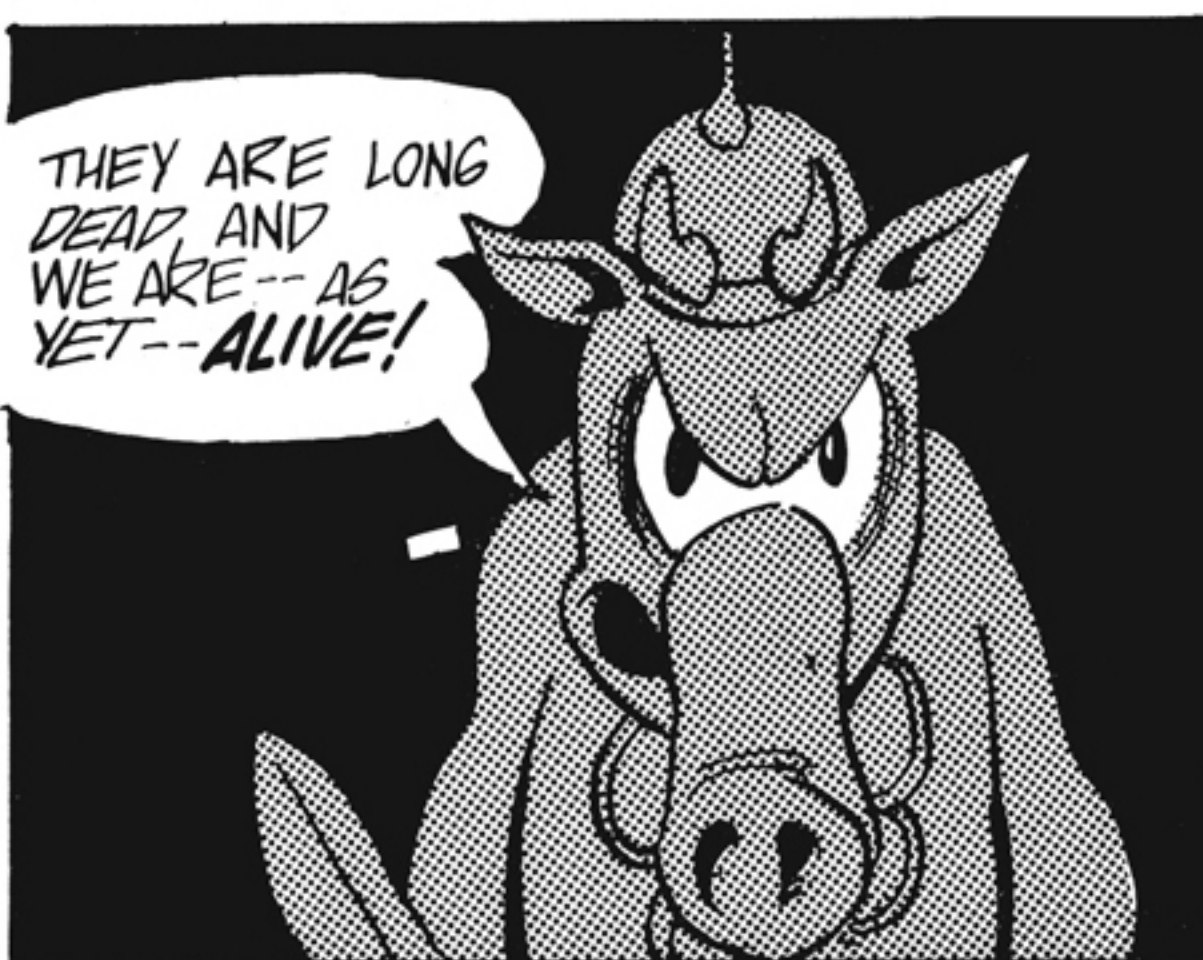


A BAD OMEN?
AYE-- BONES FOUND
STRIPPED OF FLESH
ARE ALWAYS A **BAD**
OMEN...

...FOR THEIR
FORMER
OWNERS...!



THEY ARE LONG
DEAD, AND
WE ARE-- AS
YET-- **ALIVE!**



DON'T CONCERN YOUR-
SELVES WITH OLD **BONES**





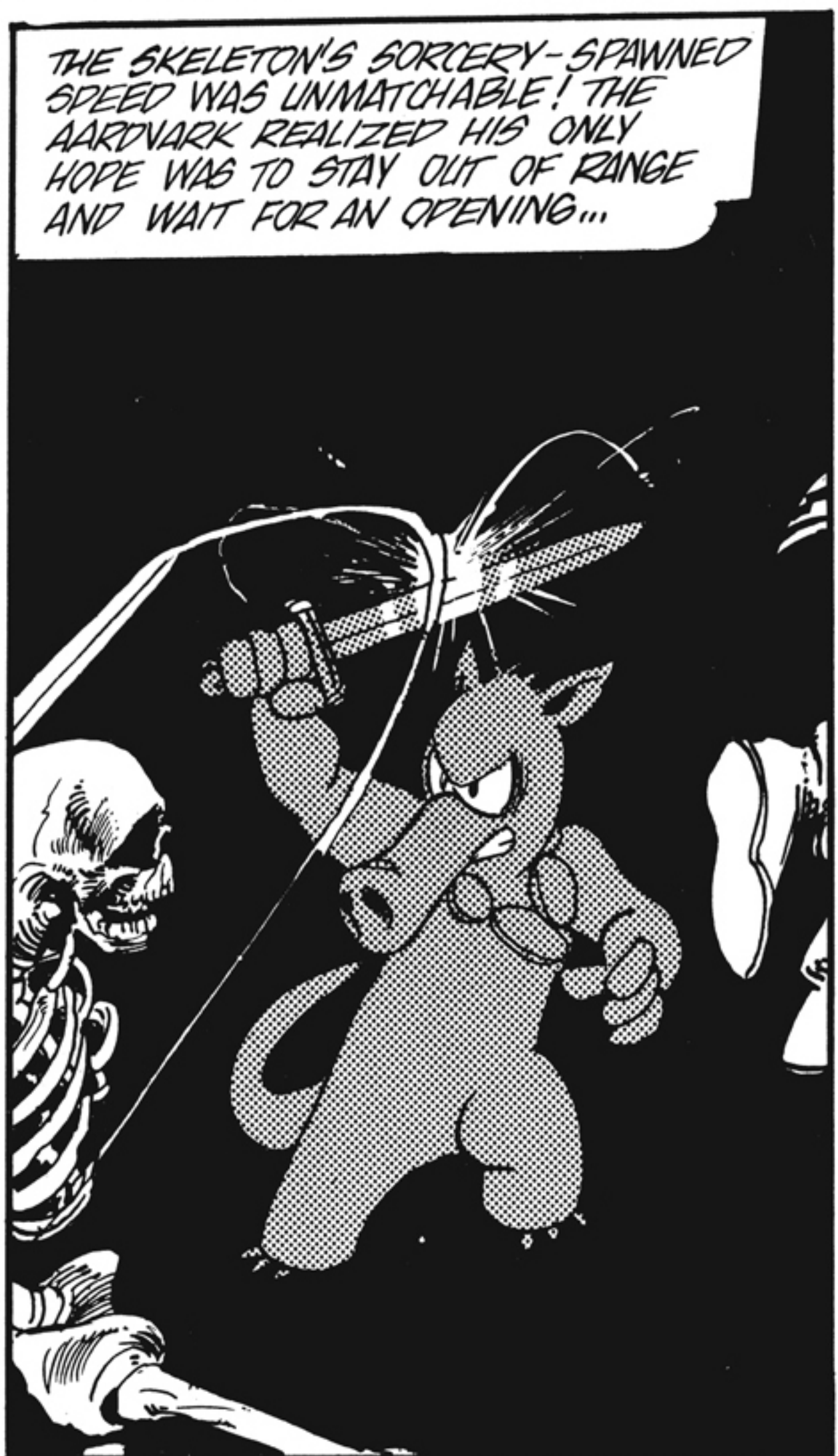
CEREBUS!



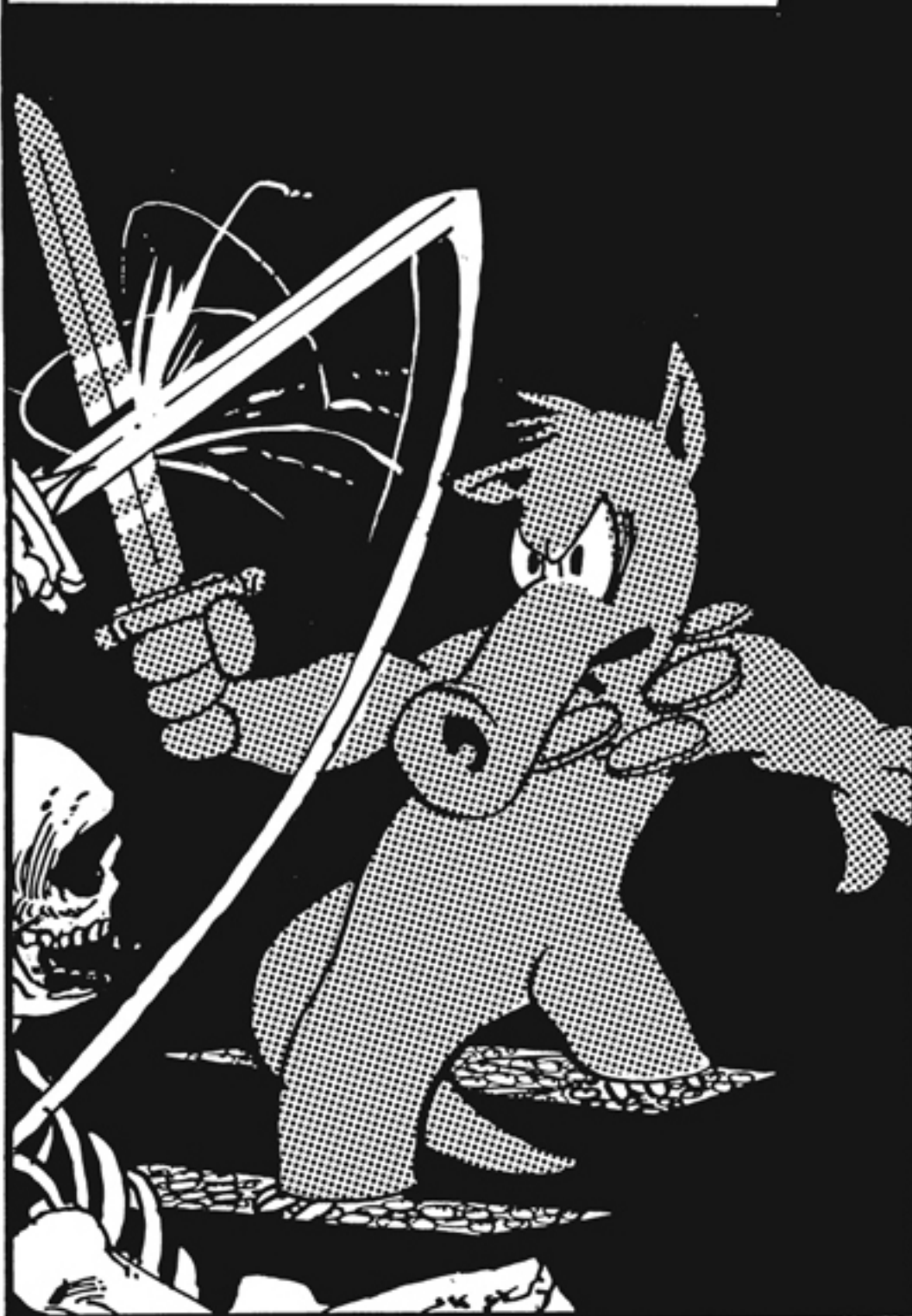
THE SKELETON'S SORCERY-SPAWNED SPEED WAS UNMATCHABLE! THE ARMADILLO REALIZED HIS ONLY HOPE WAS TO STAY OUT OF RANGE AND WAIT FOR AN OPENING...



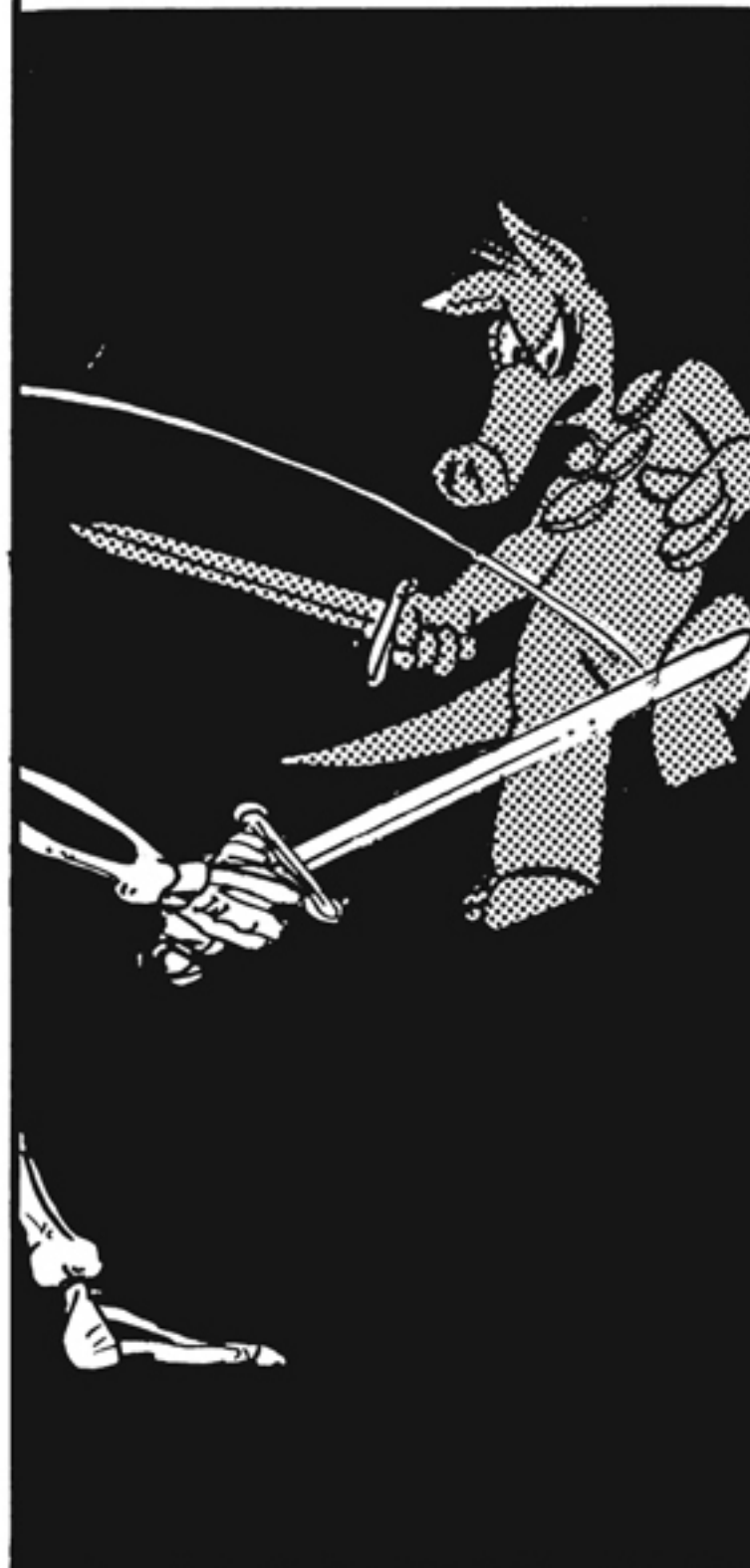
GET OUT... AS FAST AS YOU CAN!



THE HEAVY BLADE SLICED THE GLOOMY AIR AND CRASHED AGAINST THE AARDVARK'S BLADE AS CEREBUS BACKED UP THE SHADOWED STAIRS...



LIKE A BLINDING FLAME, THE STEEL FLICKERED AND SLASHED IN FRONT OF HIM...



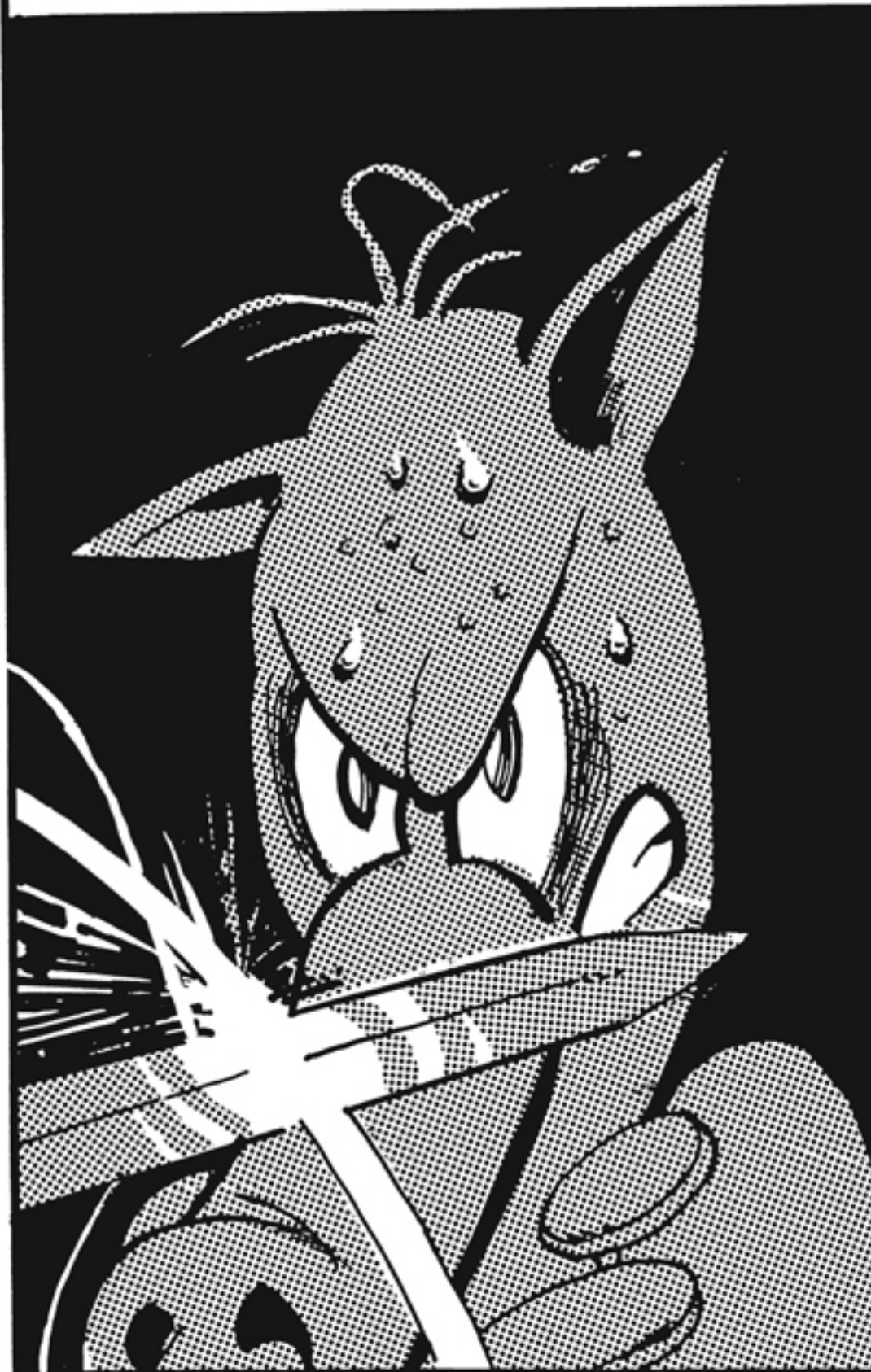
HIS EYES INTENT, CEREBUS WATCHED EACH SUBTLE MOTION OF THE BLADE AND MET IT EACH TIME WITH HIS OWN...



HE MUST ATTACK! WHY DOESN'T HE **ATTACK** LIKE THE OTHERS DID?



INCH BY AGONIZING INCH WAS SURRENDERED AS BEADS OF SWEAT STOOD OUT ON THE EARTH PIG'S FOREHEAD.



BEFORE HIM LOOMED THE UNDEAD FORM! IT'S EYES **BLAZED** COLDLY, LIKE TWIN FIRES IN SOME HELLISH **TOMB**...

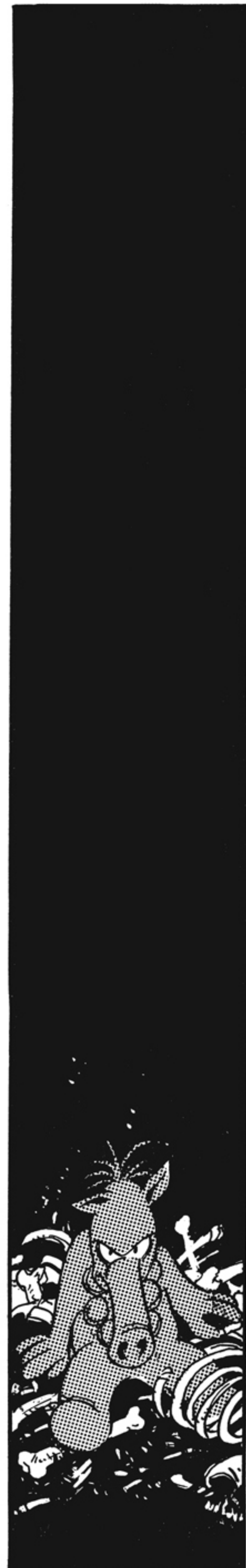




INEXPLICABLY, THE SKELETON HESITATED FOR A SPLIT SECOND! IN THAT SAME INSTANT **CEREBUS** LEAPT UNDER THE OUTSTRETCHED SWORD...



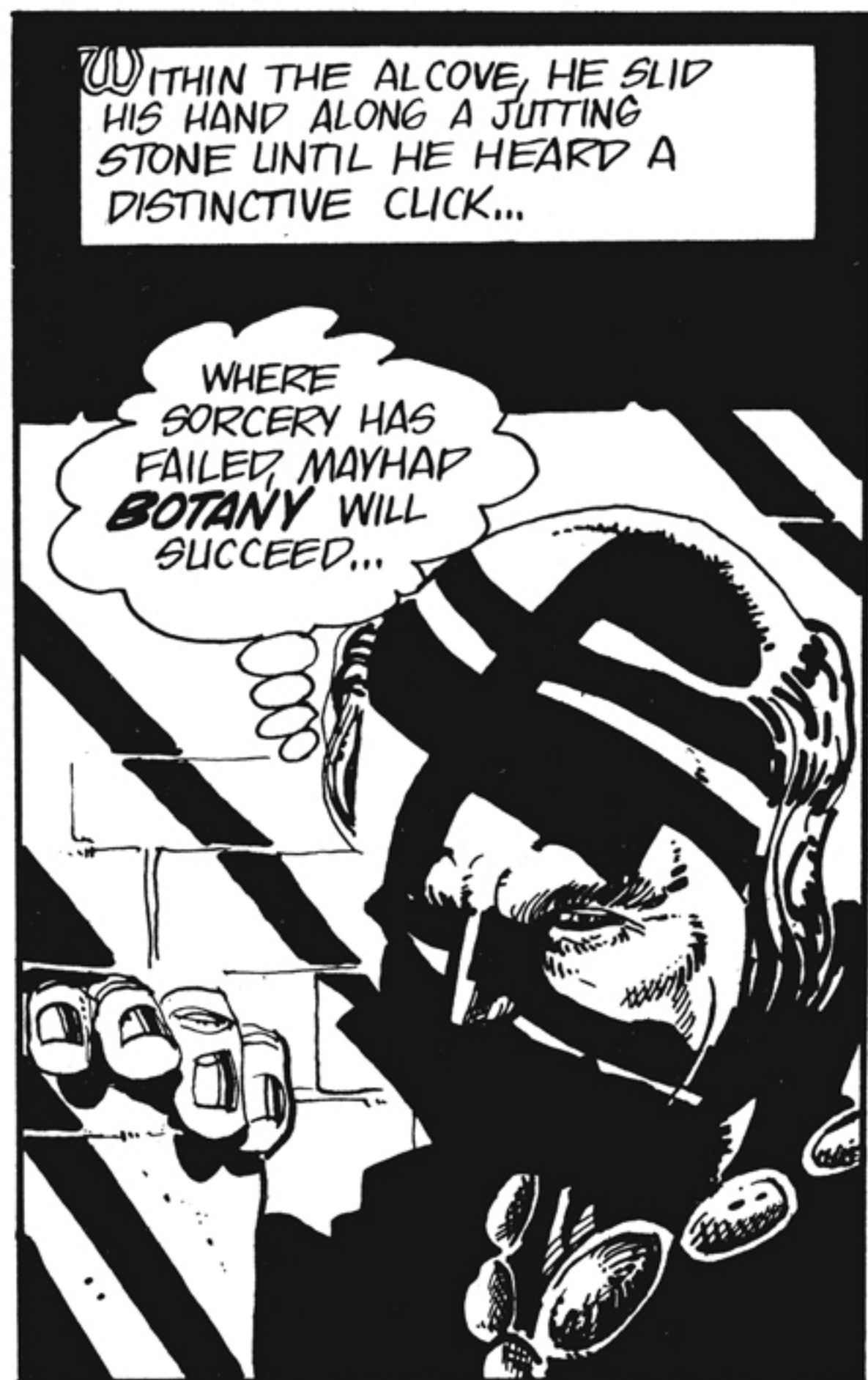
...AND THREW BOTH HIMSELF AND THE ENSORCELLED SKELETON INTO THE YAWNING BLACKNESS...





AS CEREBUS REJOINED HIS COMPANIONS, THE WIZARD CONTEMPLATED NEW STRATEGY

TWICE HAS MY SORCERY FAILED ME, DAMMIT!



WITHIN THE ALCOVE, HE SLID HIS HAND ALONG A JUTTING STONE UNTIL HE HEARD A DISTINCTIVE CLICK...

WHERE SORCERY HAS FAILED, MAYHAP **BOTANY** WILL SUCCEED...



EH?

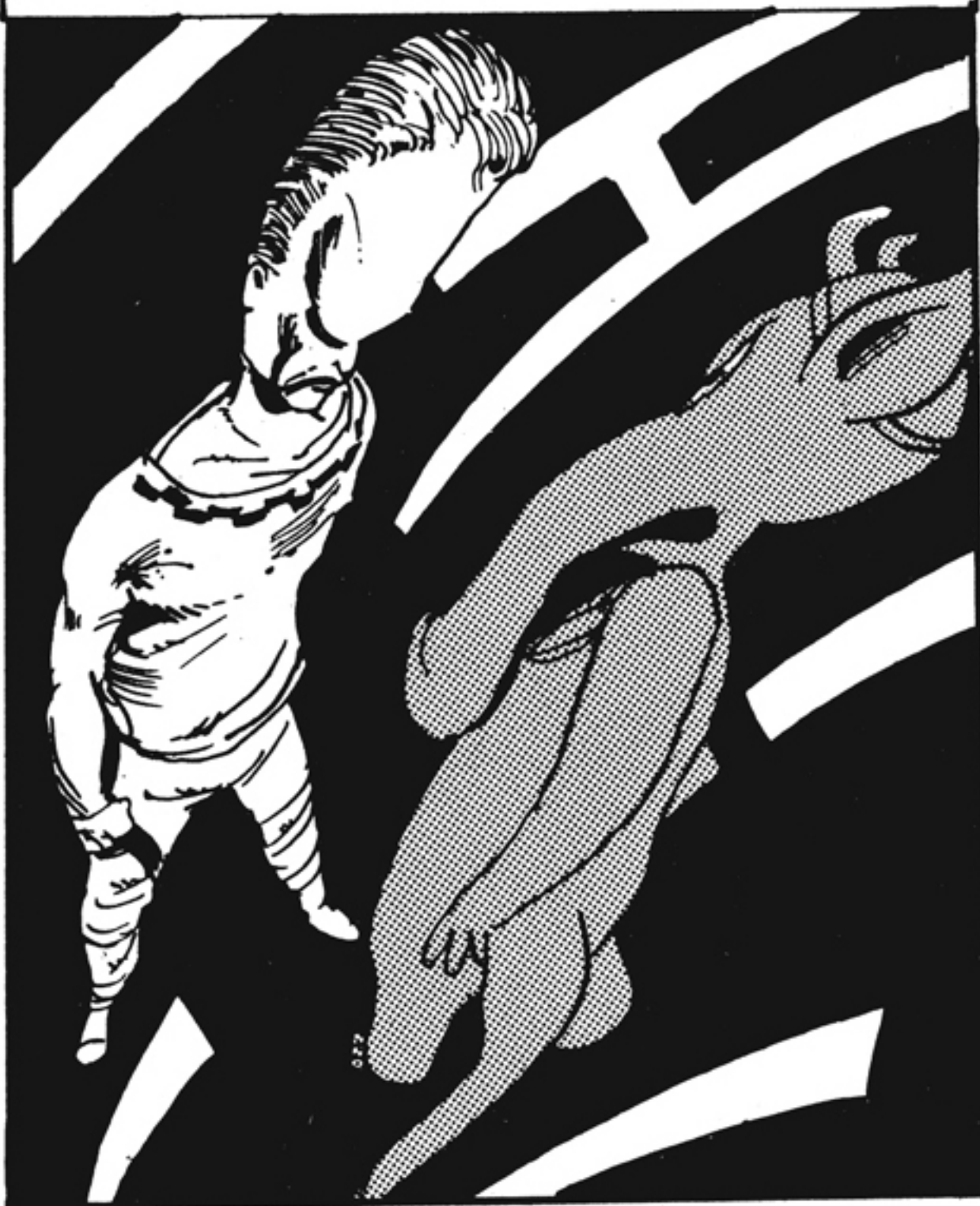
FLOWERS?



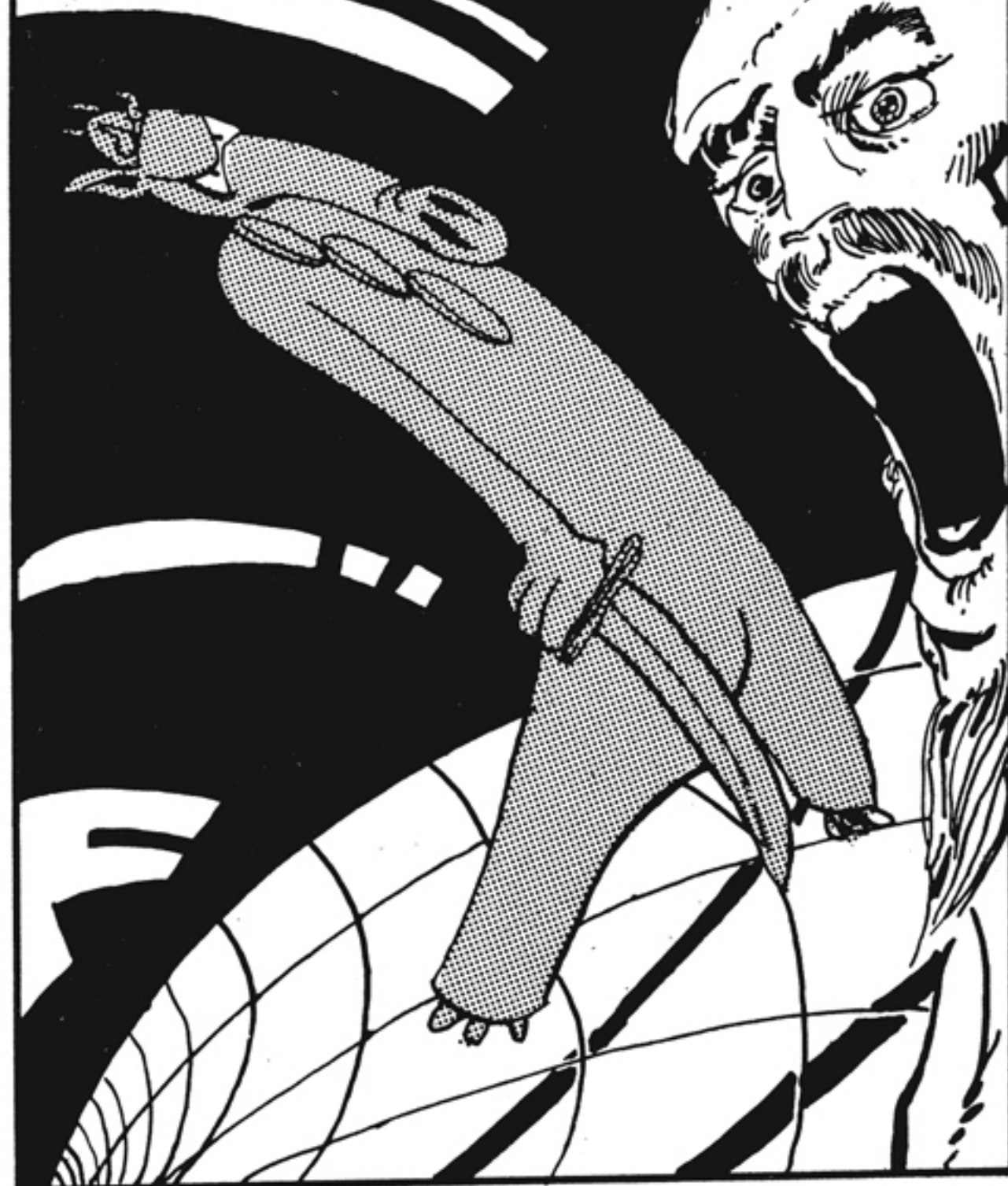
WHAT MADNESS IS THIS? IF HE SEEKS TO STOP CEREBUS WITH FLOWERS HE...



CEREBUS, IGNORANT OF HALUCINOGENS,
WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE BY THE **NAMA**
LOTUS BLOSSOMS...



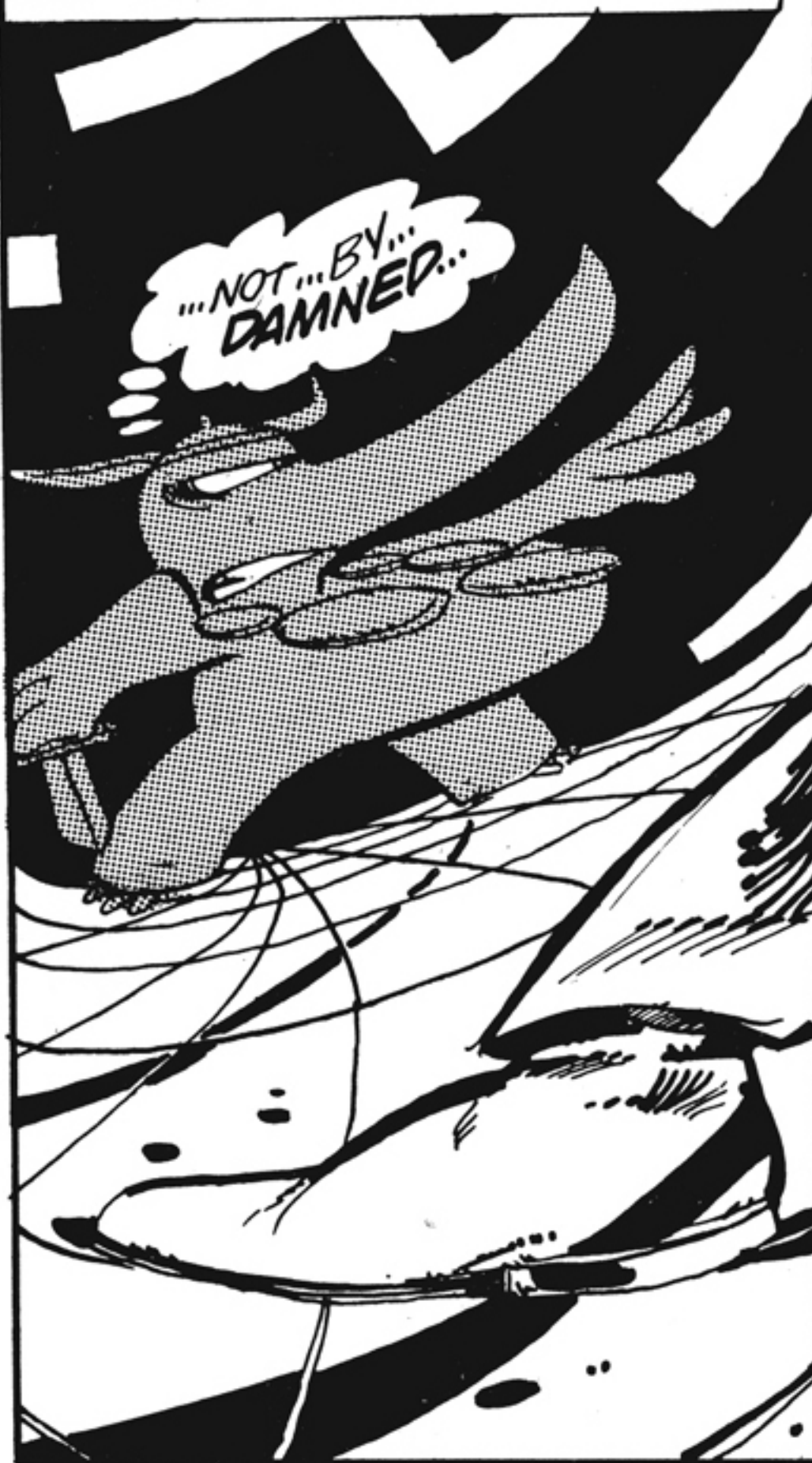
HIS THOUGHTS WERE CONFUSED
AS HE STRAINED TO KEEP
HIS BALANCE...



IF CEREBUS
IS TO BE DEFEAT-
ED LET IT BE BY
SWORD OR NEURONANCY
...

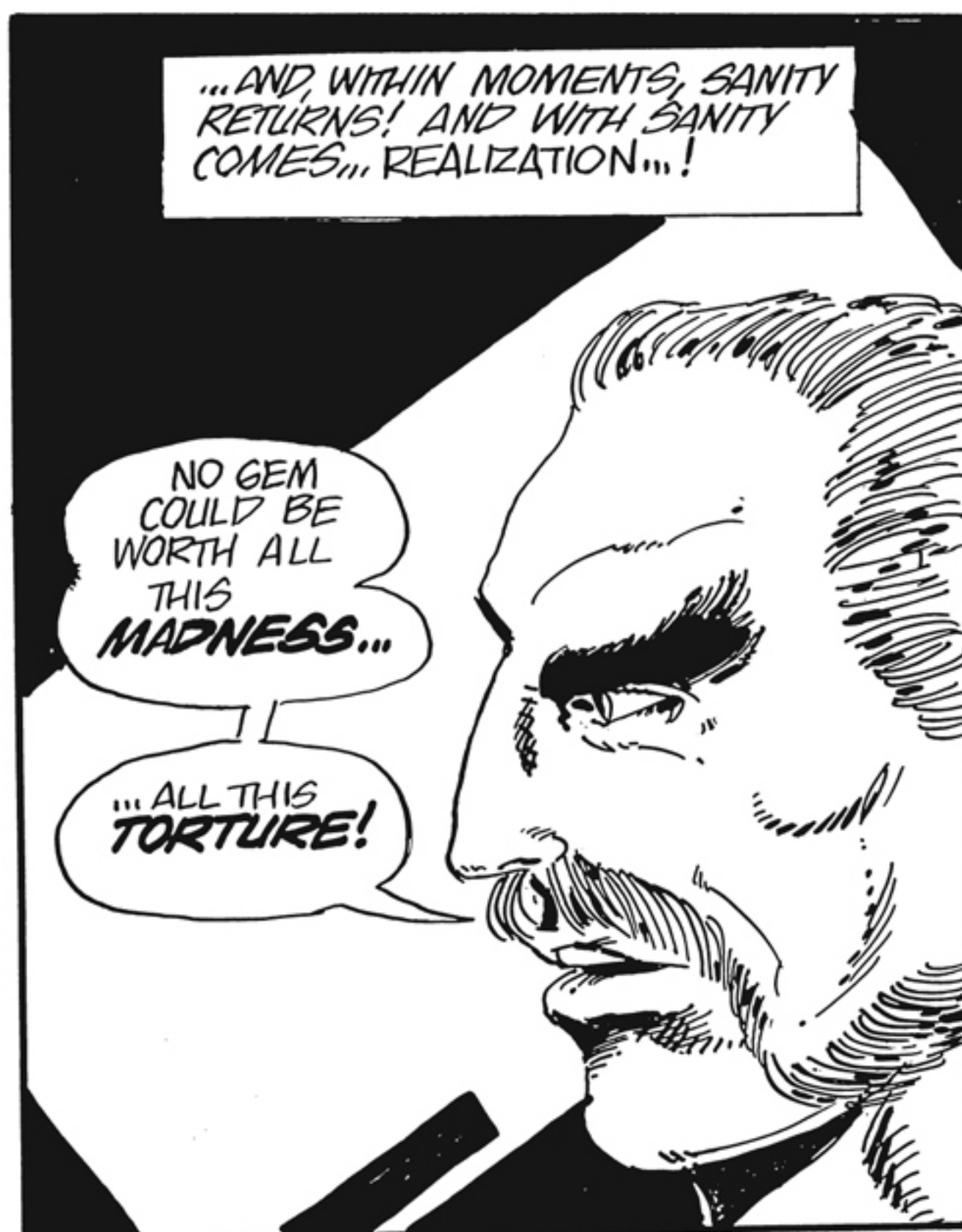


THE AARDVARK STRUGGLED UP FROM
THE MIRE THAT ENFOLDED HIS
MIND... EVERY FIBRE OF HIS BEING
WAS APPLIED TO THE TASK...



...PETUNIAS!









THE TENTACLES SNAKED OUT INCREDIBLY FAST, DRAWING THE SWIRLING SMOKE BEHIND IT IN WISPY TRAILS...



YOUR FRIEND CANNOT HELP YOU-- NONE ESCAPE THE MONSTER FROM TIME'S DAWNING!



HOWEVER, AT THAT MOMENT, HIS EYES CLOSED, THE AARDVARK WAS SEARCHING WITH HAND AND SWORD EXTENDED...

A HORRIBLE FATE AWAITS YOU, MORTALS A THOUSAND DEATHS WILL YOU SUFFER ...



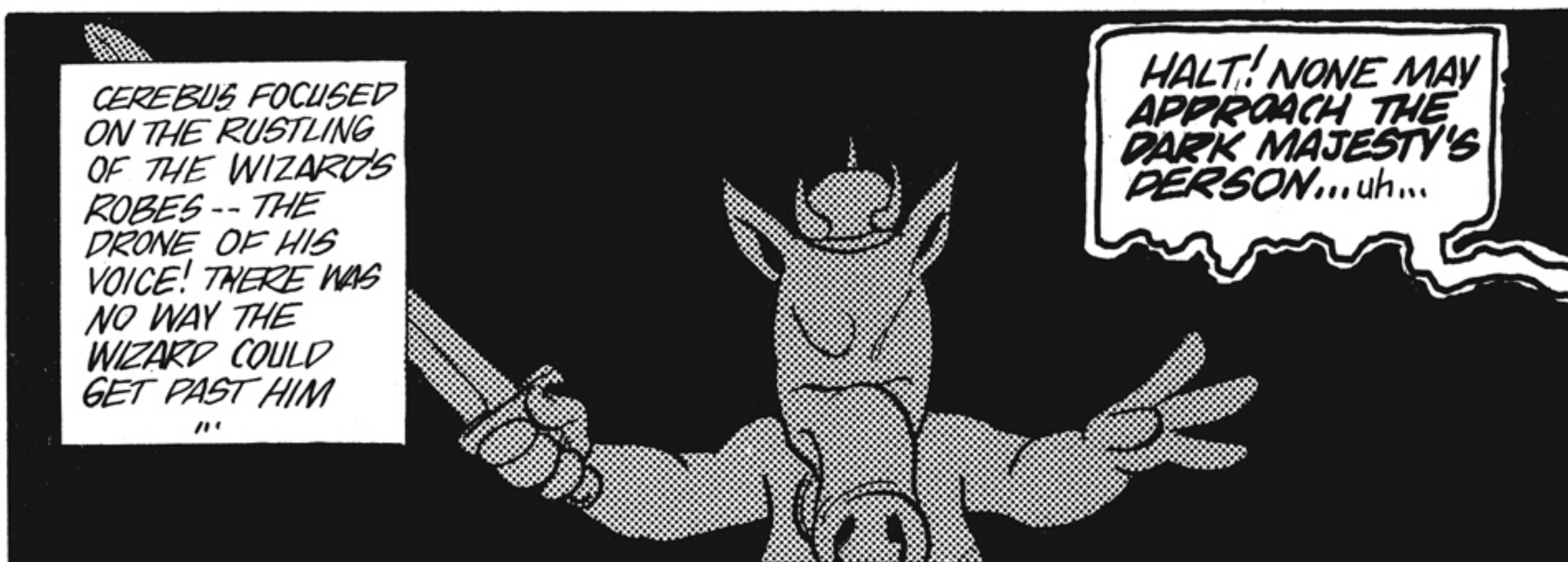
SUBMIT TO ITS EMBRACE! NONE CAN ESCAPE THE DEATH GRASP OF...



EH? THE GREY DWARF WITH THE SWORD-- WHAT'S HE UP TO?



THEN CAME THE REALIZATION-- IF THE "DWARF" COULDN'T SEE THE CONJURED BEAST, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP HIM...



CEREBUS FOCUSED ON THE RUSTLING OF THE WIZARD'S ROBES-- THE DRONE OF HIS VOICE! THERE WAS NO WAY THE WIZARD COULD GET PAST HIM

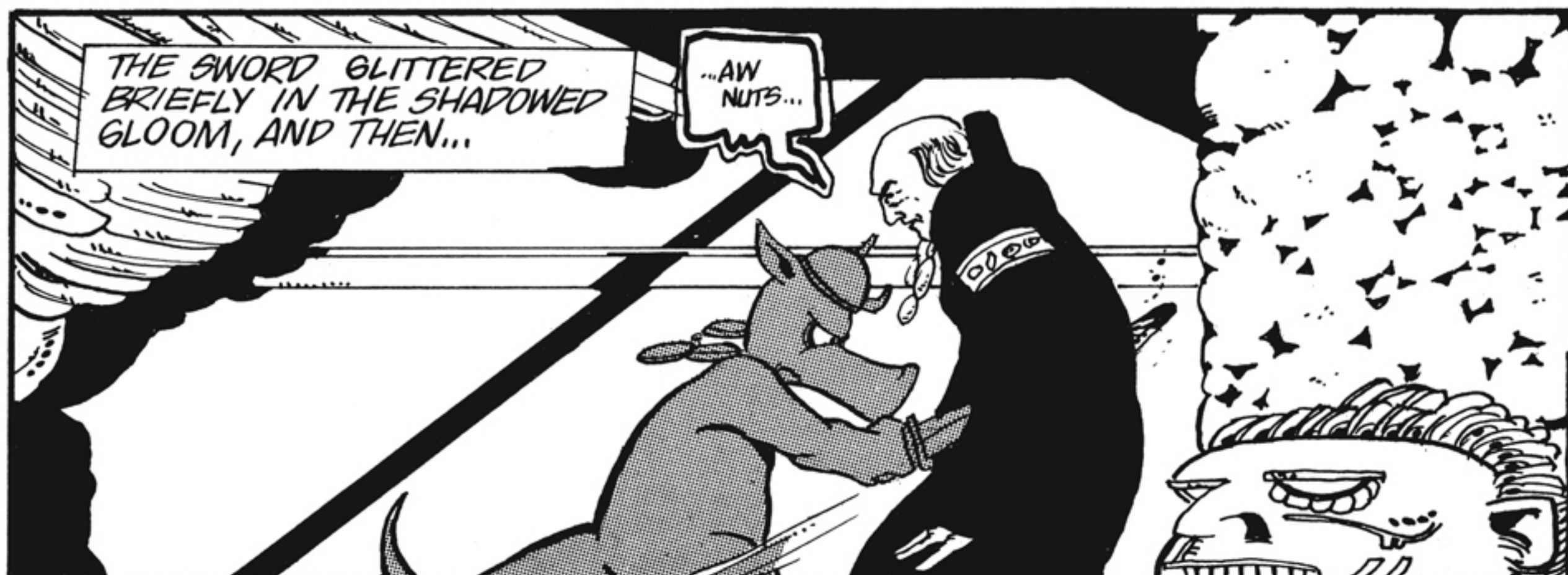
HALT! NONE MAY APPROACH THE DARK MAJESTY'S PERSON...uh...



A MOMENT LATER, HIS FINGER BRUSHED THE WIZARD'S TREMBLING HAND...

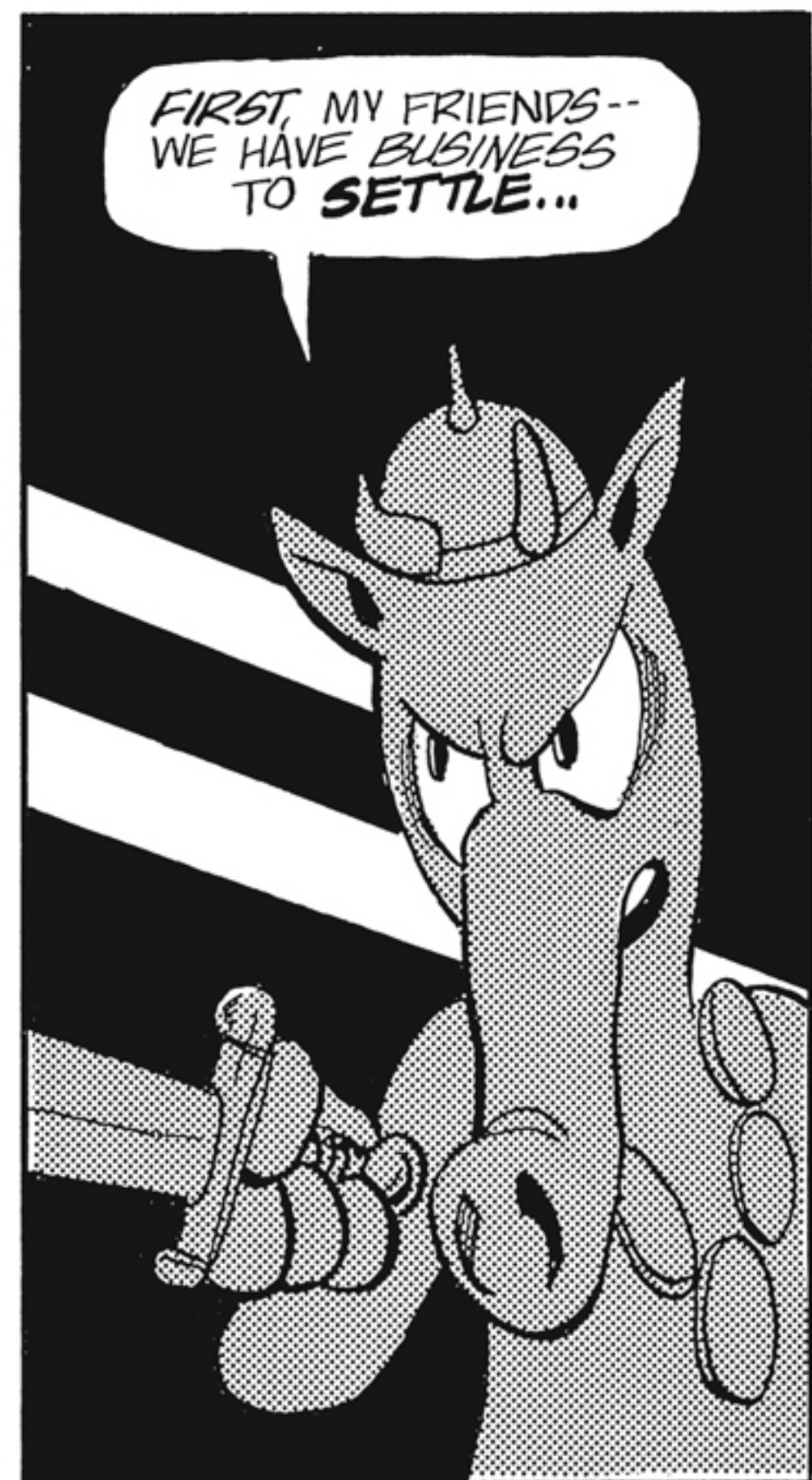
DOOM SHALL BE YOURS IF...

HARK TO MY WORDS! FOR MINE IS THE POWER OF ASHEM, SOGGOT RA, MINE IS...



THE SWORD GLITTERED BRIEFLY IN THE SHADOWED GLOOM, AND THEN...

...AW NUTS...



THE JEWEL WAS WRAPPED CAREFULLY IN A PIECE OF THE WIZARD'S CLOAK AS THEY LEFT THE CENTRAL CHAMBER...

YOU PROMISED ME A POUCH OF GOLD IF I GOT YOU THE JEWEL...

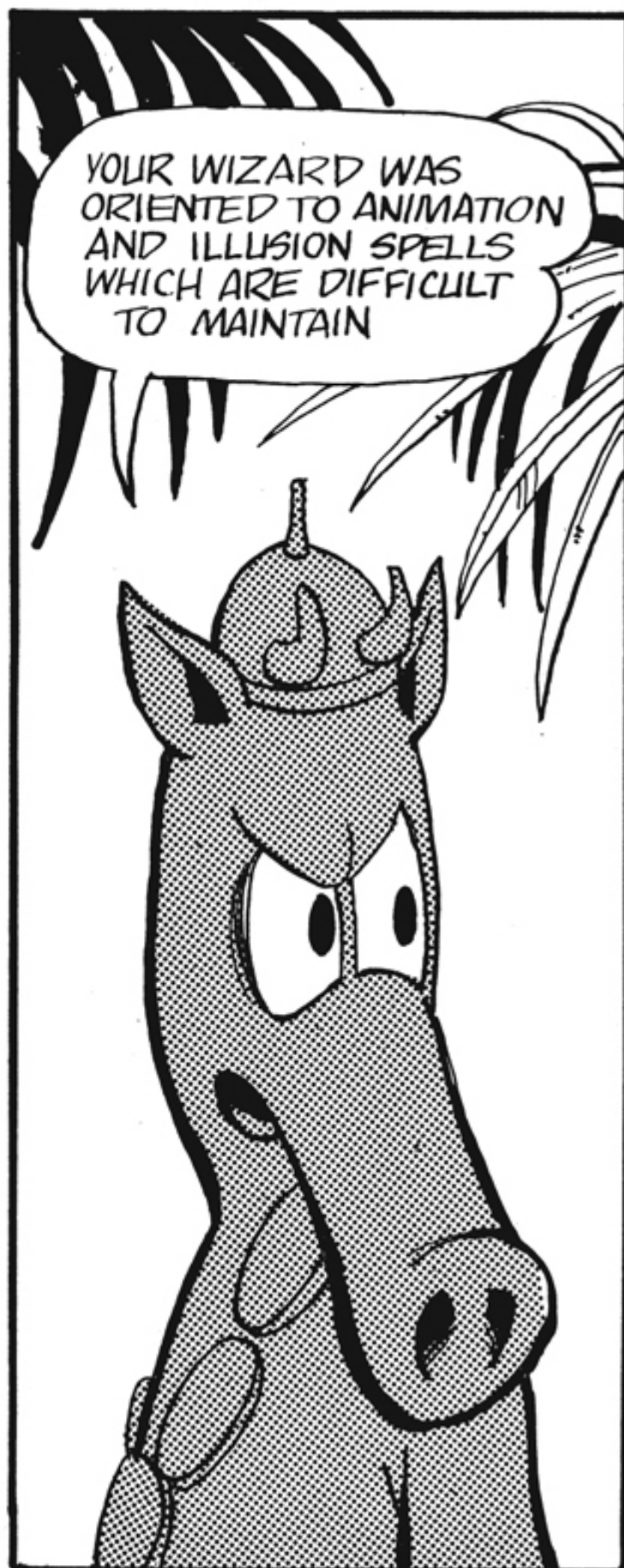
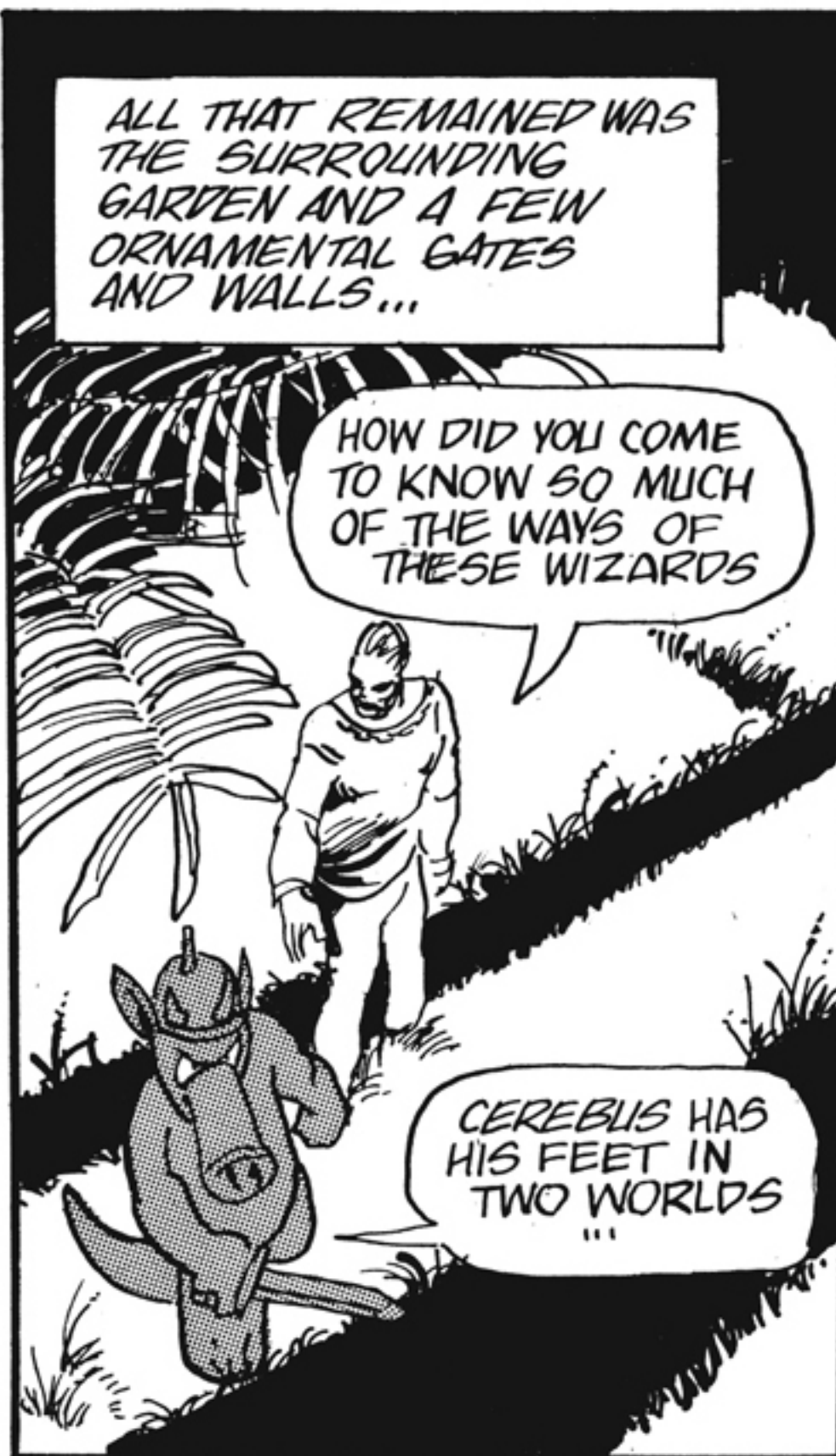
OF COURSE! BUT ONCE WE SELL THE JEWEL YOU SHALL HAVE A THOUSAND--NAY! TEN TIMES A THOUSAND POUCHES OF GOLD!

A NEARBY STATUE BECAME, SLOWLY, LESS SUBSTANTIAL AS THE WIZARD'S SORCERY SLIPPED AWAY, LIKE SANDS IN AN HOUR-GLASS...

ONE POUCH WILL SUFFICE...

GRADUALLY, THE HALL SHIMMERED AND FADED AROUND THEM LIKE A BAD DREAM...

... AND THEY WERE OUTSIDE IN THE PRE-DAWN AIR...



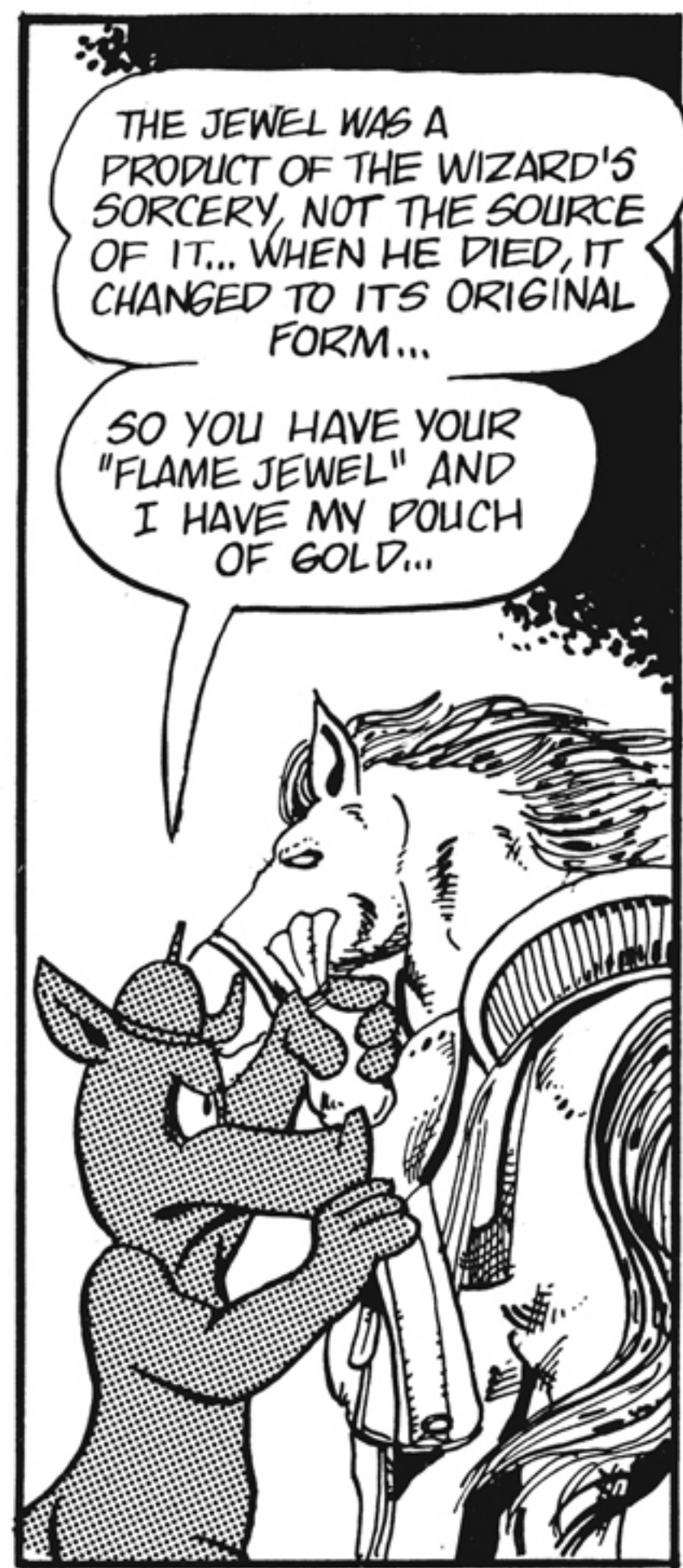


...WALNUT.



YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE FOR...

...A POUCH OF GOLD.



THE JEWEL WAS A PRODUCT OF THE WIZARD'S SORCERY, NOT THE SOURCE OF IT... WHEN HE DIED, IT CHANGED TO ITS ORIGINAL FORM...

SO YOU HAVE YOUR "FLAME JEWEL" AND I HAVE MY POUCH OF GOLD...



...WHICH MAY NOT SEEM **EXACTLY** FAIR...



...BUT **CEREBUS** HAS NO CAUSE FOR COMPLAINT.



IT WAS, THE THIEVES WOULD LATER SAY THE FIRST TIME THEY HAD HEARD AN EARTH-PIG **LAUGH...**

cerebus the aardvark

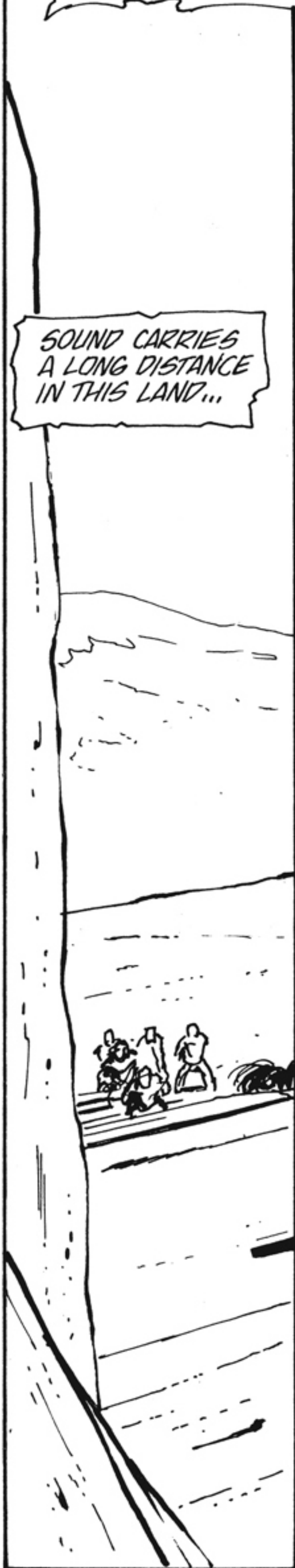
"AFTER HIS BRUSH WITH WIZARDRY AND THE FLAME JEWEL, **CEREBUS** VANISHES FOR A TIME, HIS INTEREST IN THE CITIES OF THE SOUTH OBVIOUSLY ON THE WANE. HE IS NEXT SEEN IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF TANSUBAL WHERE, HIS POUCH OF GOLD LONG GONE, HE JOINS A MILITARY EXPEDITION BOUND FOR BOREALA AND THE COUNTRIES NORTH-EAST OF THERE, WHERE IT IS SAID THERE IS A GREAT DEMAND FOR MERCENARIES TO FIGHT IN THE **BLOOD WARS**...."

SOUND CARRIES A LONG DISTANCE IN THIS LAND...

TO SOME, EACH SOUND IS ALIKE, BE IT AVALANCHE OR ECHO...

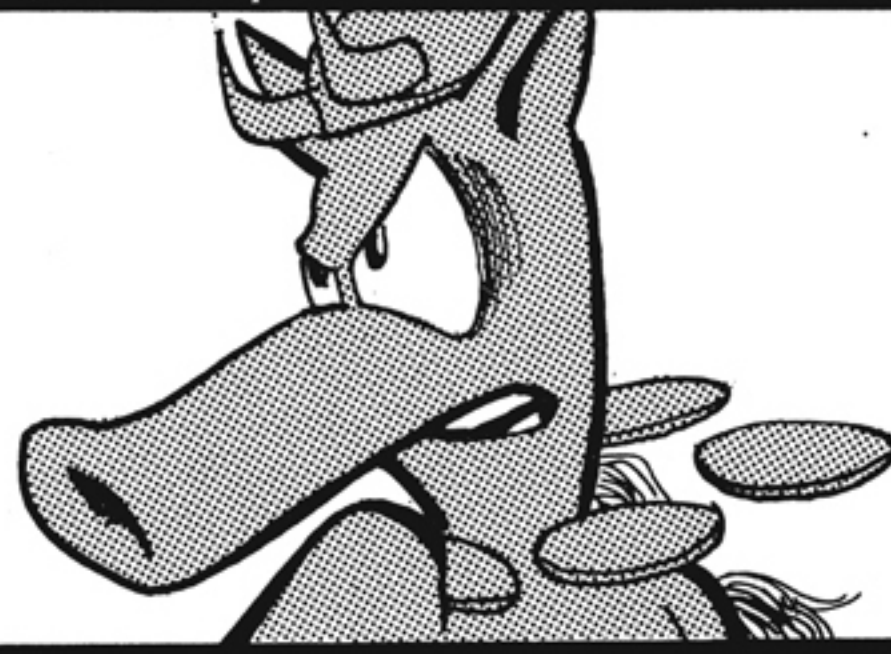
TO THE EARTH-PIG BORN, EACH SOUND BEARS IT'S OWN TALE! SO IT IS, AS HIS COMPANIONS PANT AND WHEEZE AROUND HIM...

...CEREBUS HOLDS HIS BLADE AT THE READY AND WATCHES EACH DARKENED CREVICE OF THE SURROUNDING WALLS OF ICE AND SNOW...



THEY ARE ON THE EXPEDITION IN A MOMENT! FOUR ARE DEAD BEFORE ANY, SAVE CEREBUS, IS EVEN AWARE OF THE PRESENCE OF DANGER! THEY ARE **BOREALAN MARAUDERS**, MOST FEARED AND HATED OF THE THIEVING AND NOMADIC NORTHERN TRIBES...

THERE ISN'T EVEN TIME FOR A WARNING SHOUT! CEREBUS TURNS, HIS BLADE READY, AND HE, TOO, IS SWEEPED UP IN THE FRENZIED **BLOOD-LETTING!**...



EVEN AS THE MARAUDERS' HEAVY SWORDS TAKE THEIR TOLL OF THE EXHAUSTED AND NEARLY FROZEN SOUTHLANDERS...



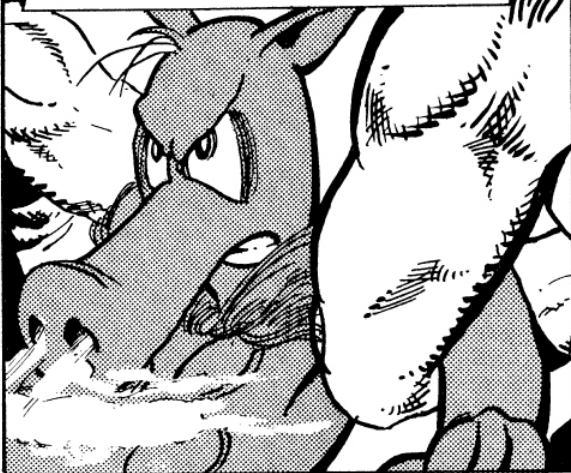
CAPTIVE ⁱⁿ BOREALA

...CEREBUS THE AARDVARK IS AMONG THEM,
HIS BLADE, LIKE A WHIRLWIND, DISPATCHING
THE RAGGED MAKALUDERS WITH
EACH THRUST...!



©1978 Dave Sim

SHEER NUMBERS ARE CEREBUS' LINDOING AND, MOMENTS LATER, DISARMED, HE **GLOWERS** AT HIS CAPTORS....



WHATEVER MANNER OF MAN OR BEAST HE MIGHT BE...

...HE IS A GOOD AND FEARLESS WARRIOR, MY CHIEFTAIN!!!



LET HIM LIVE...

...WE CAN SELL HIM TO A FREAK SHOW IN **GURANN!**

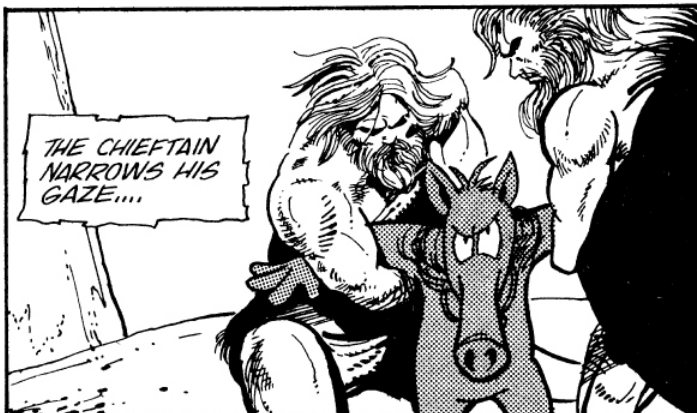


CEREBUS RECOGNIZES THE PARANIAN LILT OF THE CHIEFTAIN'S WORDS AND SPITS A CURSE AT THE TOWERING NORTHLANDER...

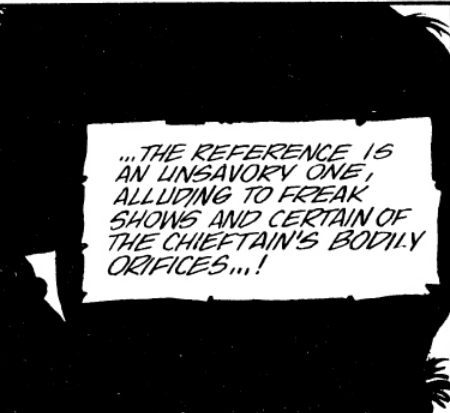
...COMNE YE TAMA STET FEGRIA!

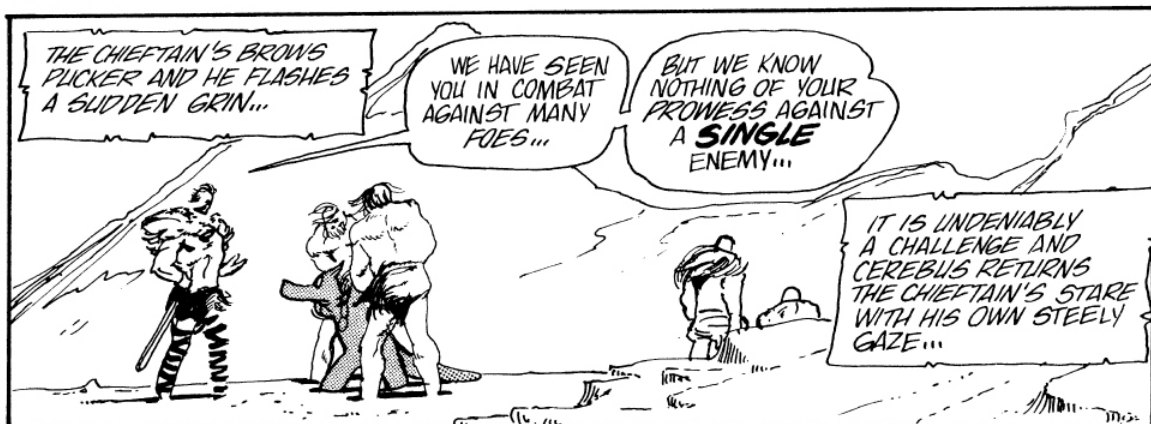
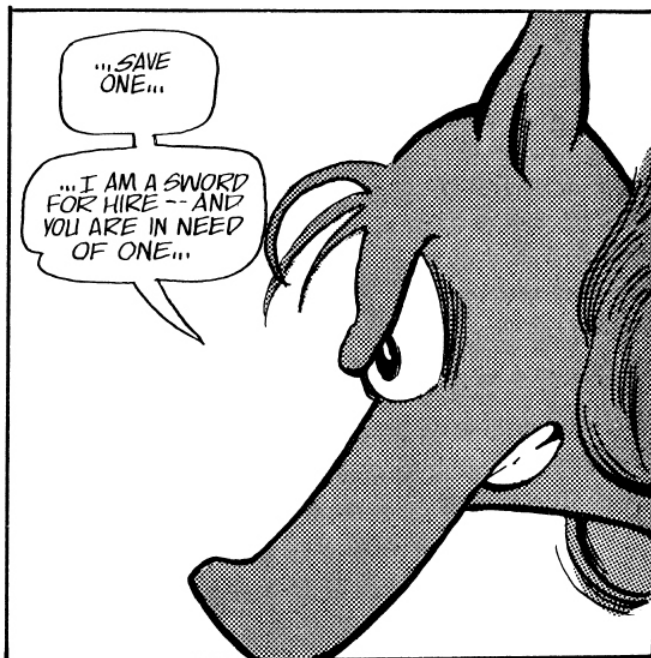


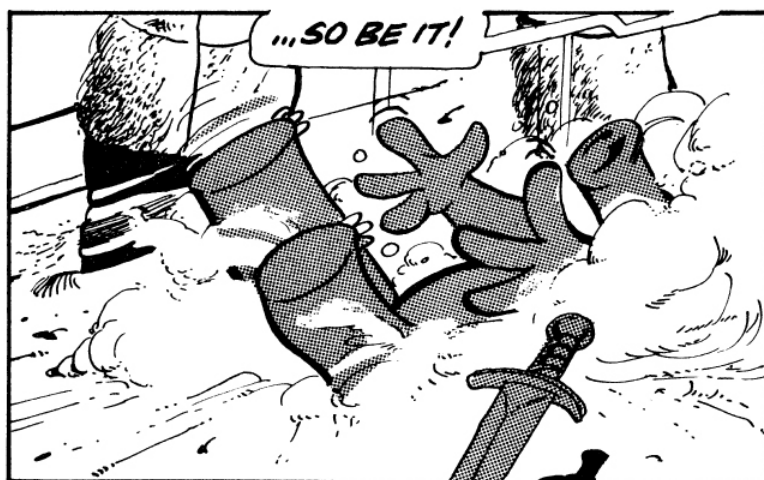
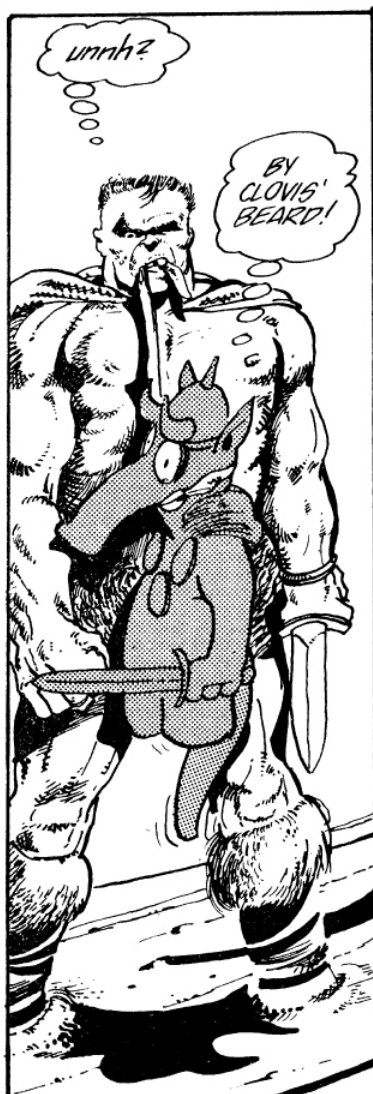
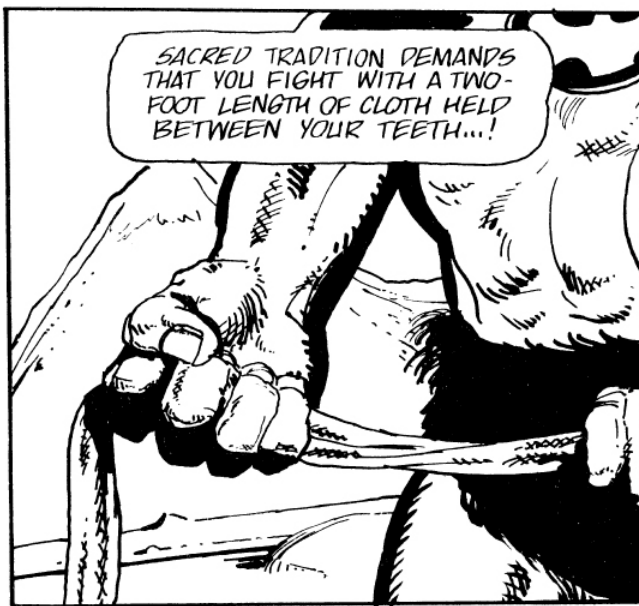
THE CHIEFTAIN NARROWS HIS GAZE....



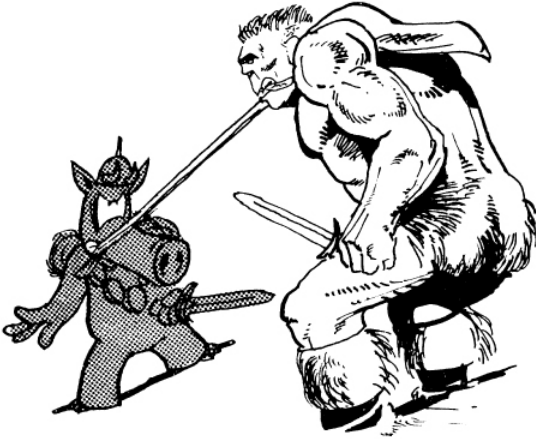
...THE REFERENCE IS AN UNSAVORY ONE, ALLUDING TO FREAK SHOWS AND CERTAIN OF THE CHIEFTAIN'S BODILY ORIFICES...!



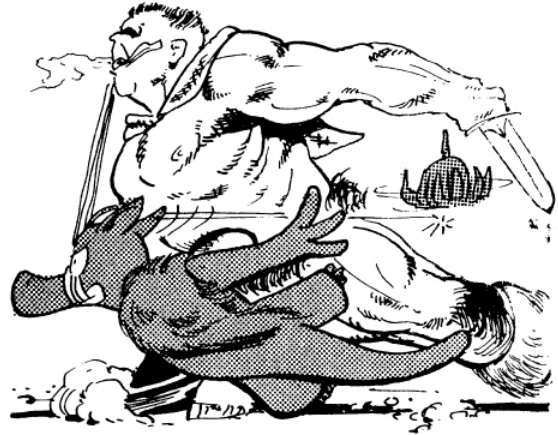




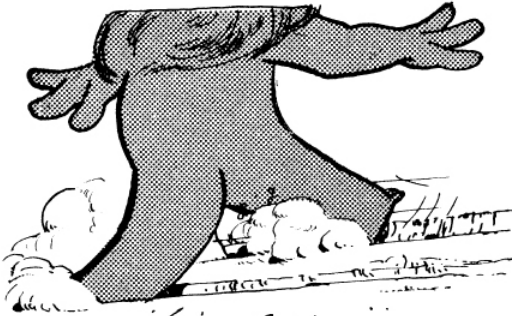
MOMENTS LATER THE TWO ARE
JOINED AND THE DEADLY DANCE
BEGINS...



ABRUPTLY, KLOG TWISTS AWAY, THROWING
CEREBUS FROM HIS FEET -- CEREBUS'
KNIFE FLIES SEVERAL FEET AWAY...



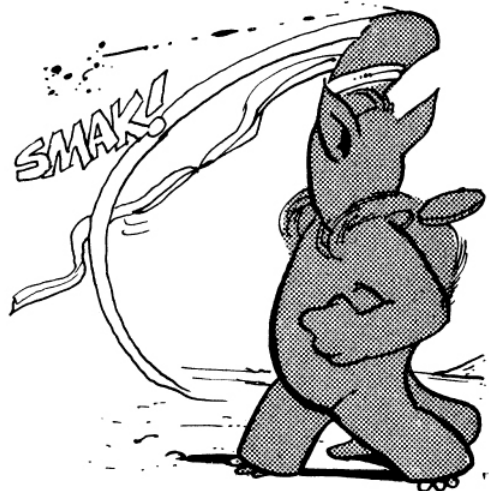
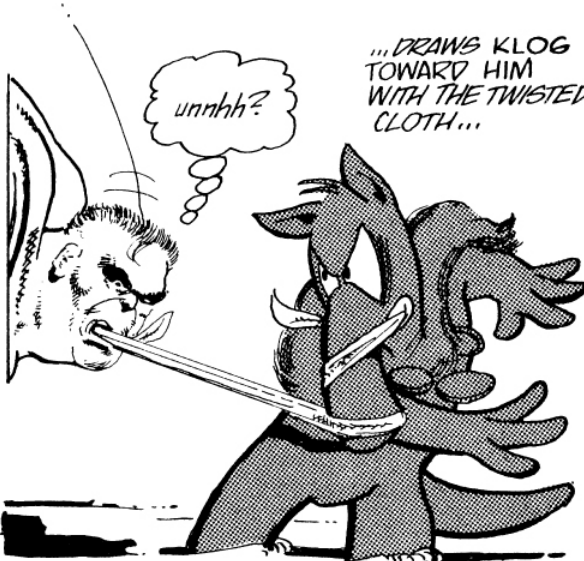
THE AARDVARK'S FEET AND TAIL
FIND PURCHASE IN THE POWDERY
SNOW AS HE PREPARES TO
MEET KLOG'S CHARGE...



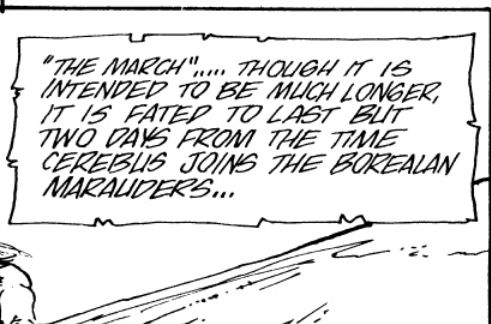
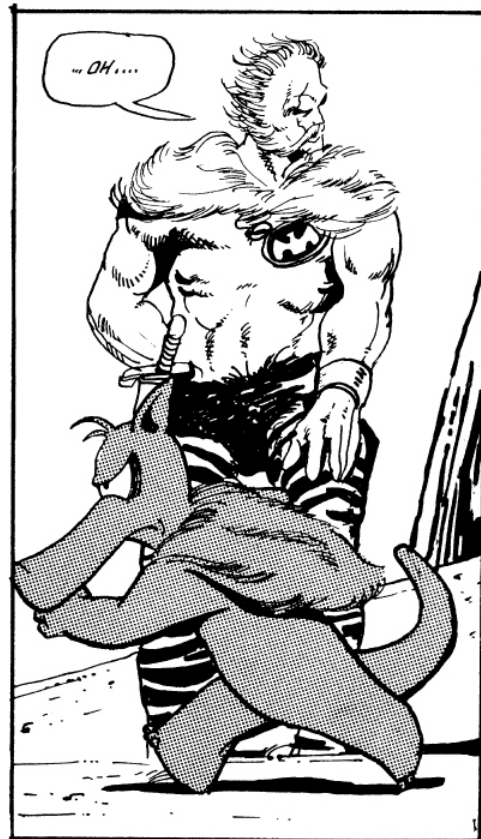
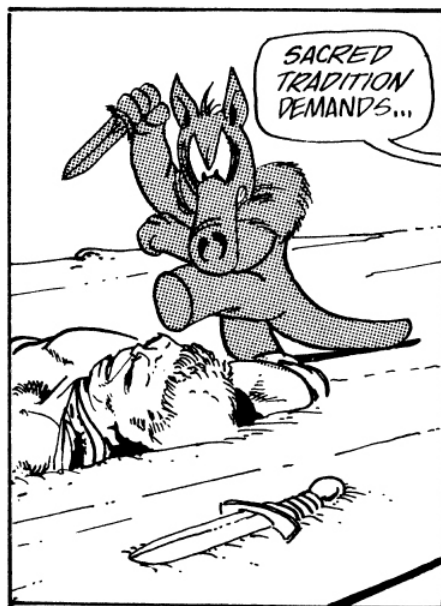
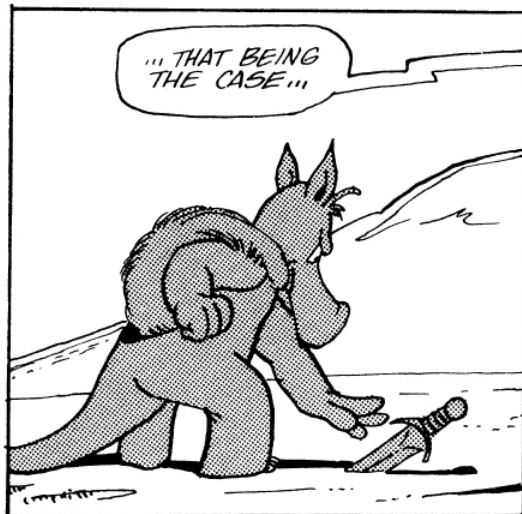
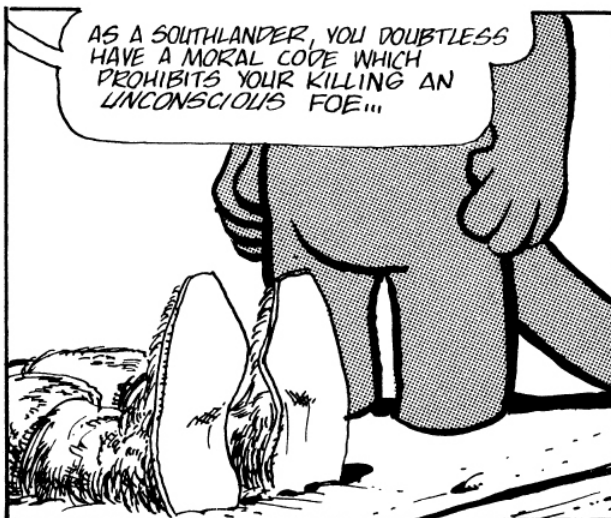
THE THRUST IS AWKWARD AND
CEREBUS EASILY DODGES IT...



...DRAWS KLOG
TOWARD HIM
WITH THE TWISTED
CLOTH...



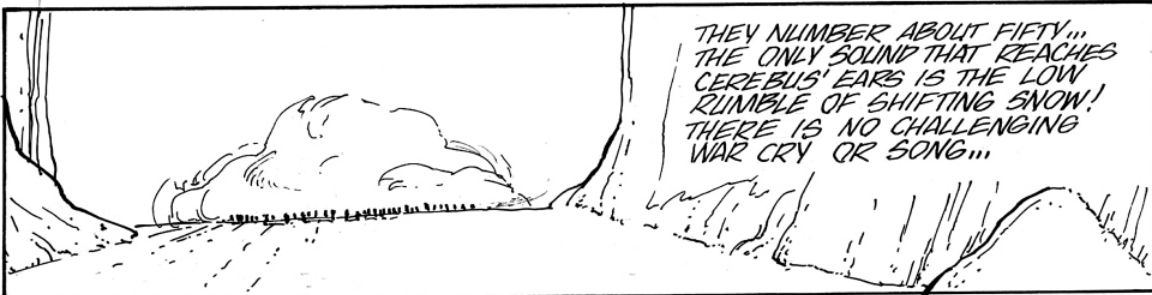
...AND UNLEASHES THE DREADED
EARTH-PIG SNOUT PUNCH!



IT IS ON THE THIRD DAY OF THE MARCH THAT THE MARAUDERS FIND THEMSELVES FACING AN ATTACK BETWEEN THE WALLS OF A SNOWY VALLEY! THE AARDVARK IS APPREHENSIVE -- THOUGH THE ATTACKERS ARE ON FOOT THEY ARE ADVANCING INCREDIBLY FAST...



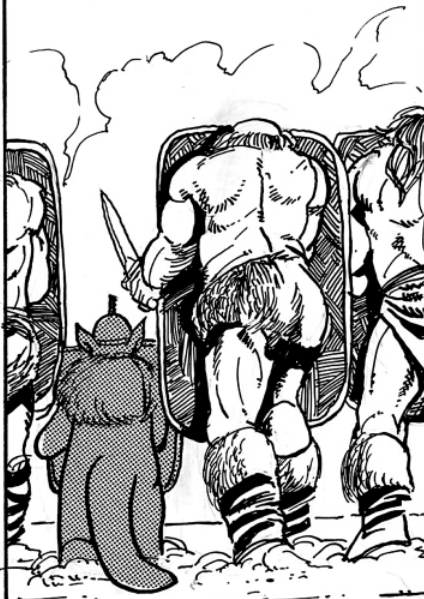
THEY NUMBER ABOUT FIFTY...
THE ONLY SOUND THAT REACHES
CEREBUS' EARS IS THE LOW
RUMBLE OF SHIFTING SNOW!
THERE IS NO CHALLENGING
WAR CRY OR SONG...



AS THEY DRAW
NEARER, CEREBUS
CAN SEE THEIR
BLADES -- HEAVY
AND COMPOSED OF
SOME FORM OF
BLACK METAL...



"WHAT MANNER OF
ARMY IS THIS?" HISSES
CEREBUS, AS HE NOTICES
THEIR GLOWING WHITE
EYES,...



THERE IS TIME FOR
ONE STRAY THOUGHT
IN THE INSTANT BEFORE
THE TWO ARMIES
CLASH!...

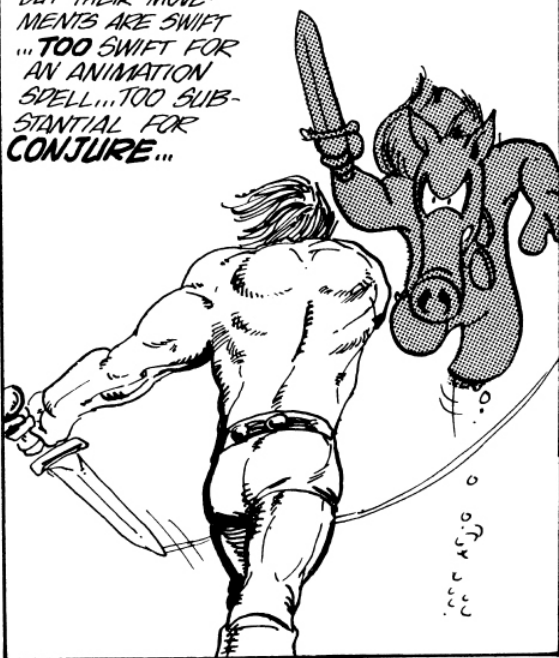


...SORCERY!

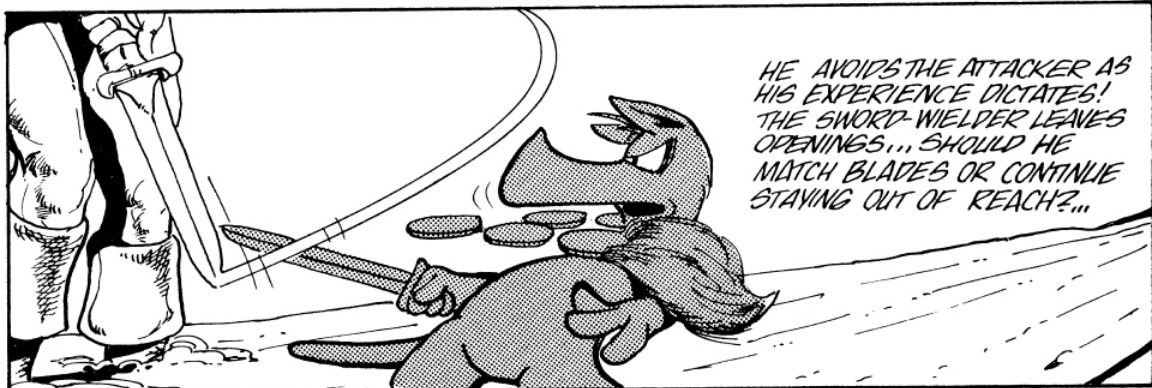
A DECISION MUST BE MADE, CEREBUS REALIZES, EVEN AS A LOOMING FIGURE CLITS HIM OFF FROM THE **BOREALANS!**



ENSORCELLED THE BEINGS ARE... BUT THEIR MOVEMENTS ARE SWIFT ...**TOO SWIFT FOR AN ANIMATION SPELL... TOO SUBSTANTIAL FOR CONJURE...**



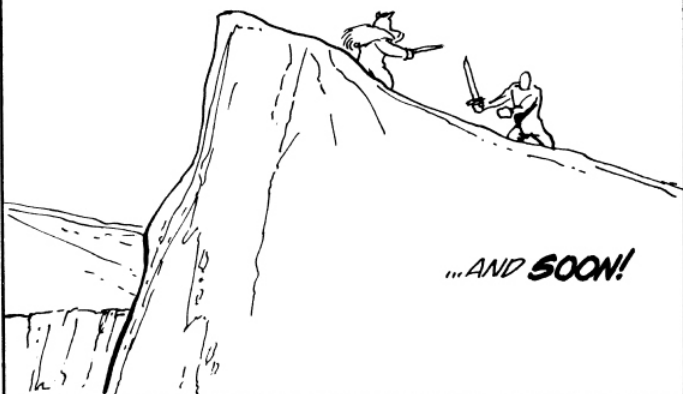
HE AVOIDS THE ATTACKER AS HIS EXPERIENCE DICTATES! THE SWORD-WIELDER LEAVES OPENINGS... SHOULD HE MATCH BLADES OR CONTINUE STAYING OUT OF REACH?...



AS THE SLOPE BENEATH HIS FEET INCREASES...



HE RECOGNIZES THE NEED TO DECIDE...



...AND **SOON!**

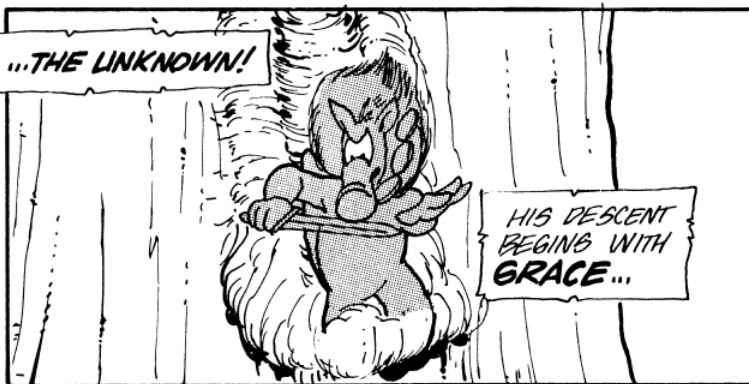
PERHAPS HE IS
BEING HERDED TOWARD
THIS PRECIPICE-- TOWARD
DANGER LINKNOWN AND
INFINITELY GREATER?



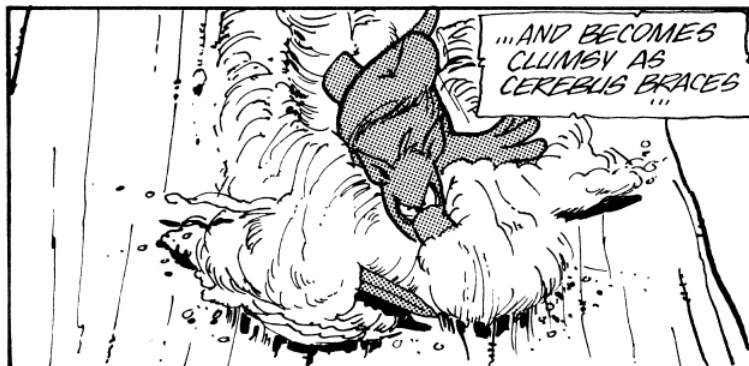
PERHAPS! BUT HE
IS UNABLE TO
FATHOM THE MAGIC
RACING TOWARD HIM!

AND, ALWAYS, GIVEN
THE CHOICE BETWEEN
UNFATHOMABLE
SORCERY AND
LINKNOWN DANGER--
THE EARTH-PIG
BORN WILL OPT
FOR...

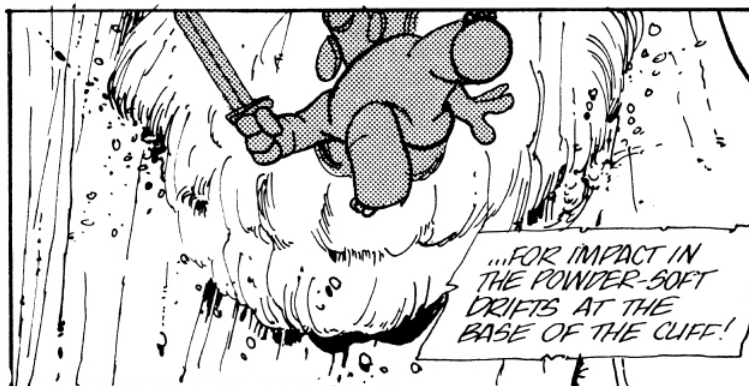
...THE LINKNOWN!



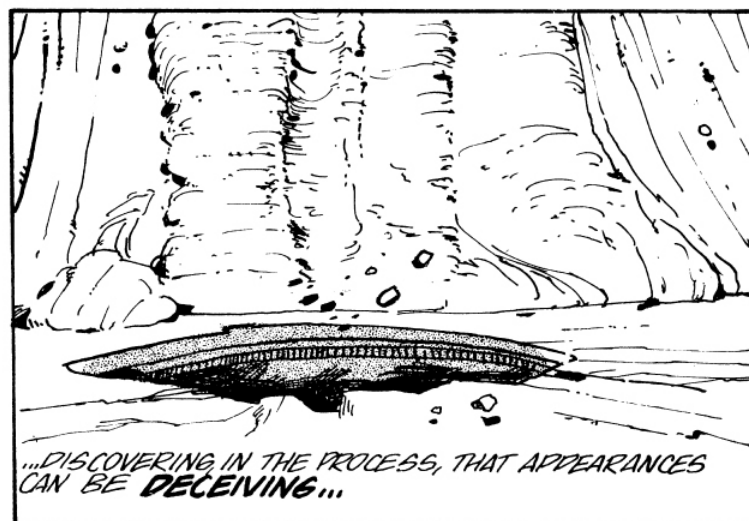
HIS DESCENT
BEGINNS WITH
GRACE...



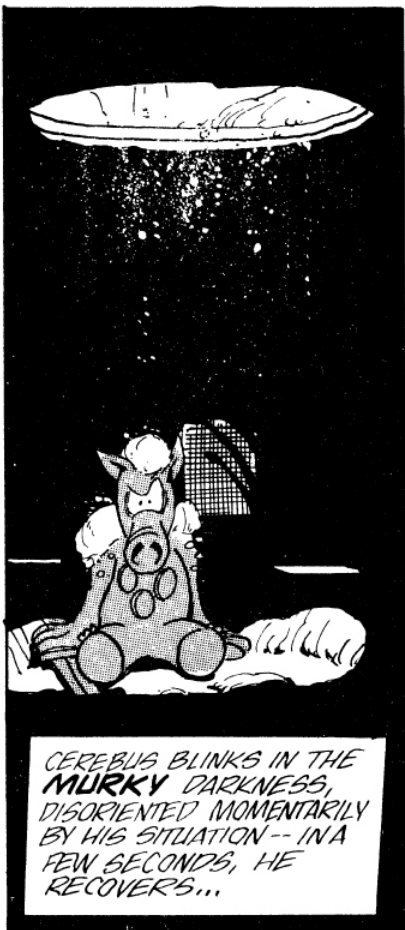
...AND BECOMES
CLUMBY AS
CEREBELLUS BRACES
...



...FOR IMPACT IN
THE POWDER-SOFT
DRIFTS AT THE
BASE OF THE CLIFF!



...DISCOVERING, IN THE PROCESS, THAT APPEARANCES
CAN BE **DECEIVING**...



CEREBUS BLINKS IN THE **MURKY** DARKNESS, DISORIENTED MOMENTARILY BY HIS SITUATION-- IN A FEW SECONDS, HE RECOVERS...



THERE IS NO HOPE OF CLIMBING FREE HE CONCLUDES, NOTING FOOTPRINTS IN THE DUST AROUND HIM, THE PRINTS ARE ABOUT A WEEK OLD...



NEARBY, WRITINGS ON THE WALL ATTRACT HIS ATTENTION-- SOMETHING ABOUT TIME AND THE IMMORTALITY OF ALL BEINGS...

THERE IS NO CLUE AS TO ESCAPE ROUTES, AND HE READS NO FURTHER...



IF ANOTHER EXIT IS TO BE FOUND, IT IS BY INVESTIGATION! CEREBUS SETS OFF INTO THE **SHADOWS**...

HIS EARS TWITCH AND SWIVEL AS HE WALKS...

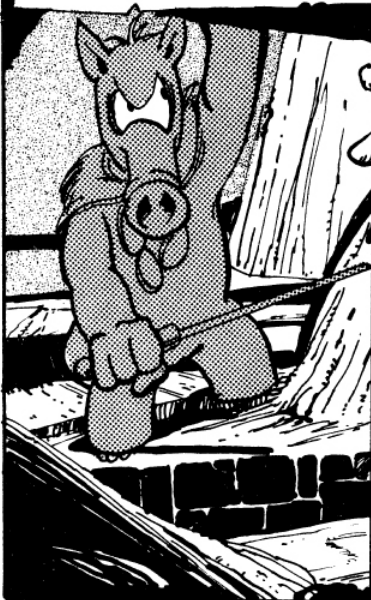


THOUGH NO SOUND BETRAYS THEIR PRESENCE THE AARDVARK IS CERTAIN OTHERS LURK IN THIS GLOOMY HALL...

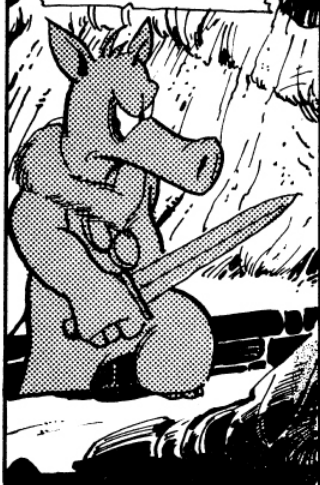


"THEY WILL SHOW THEMSELVES IN GOOD TIME," HE DECIDES, SLAPPING THE SWORD LIGHTLY AGAINST HIS THIGH...

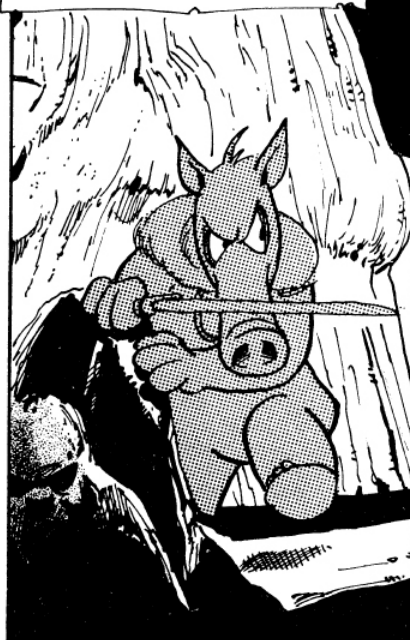
THE GLOOMY HALLWAY GIVES WAY TO EERILY LIT CAVERNS! CRUDE AND WATER SOULDED CARVINGS GAZE DOWN ON THE AARDVARK...



THE FLOOR IS UNEVEN...



...BUT CEREBUS HAS THE IMPRESSION OF GRADUAL DESCENT...

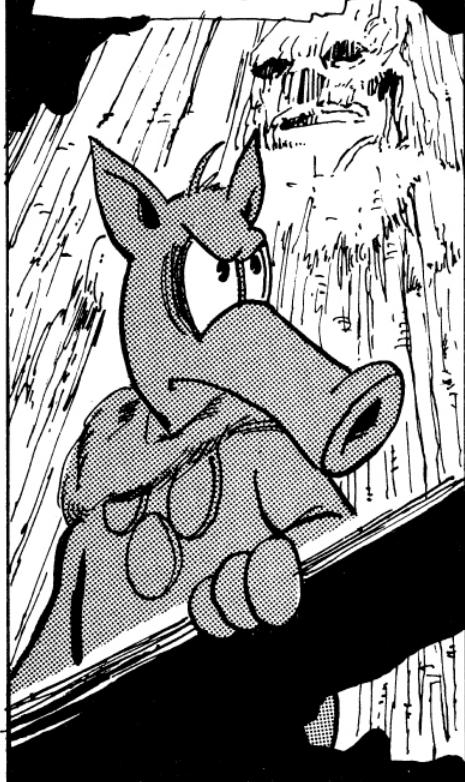


THERE IS THE SOUND OF DRIPPING WATER-- OF HIS OWN ECHOING FOOTSTEPS...



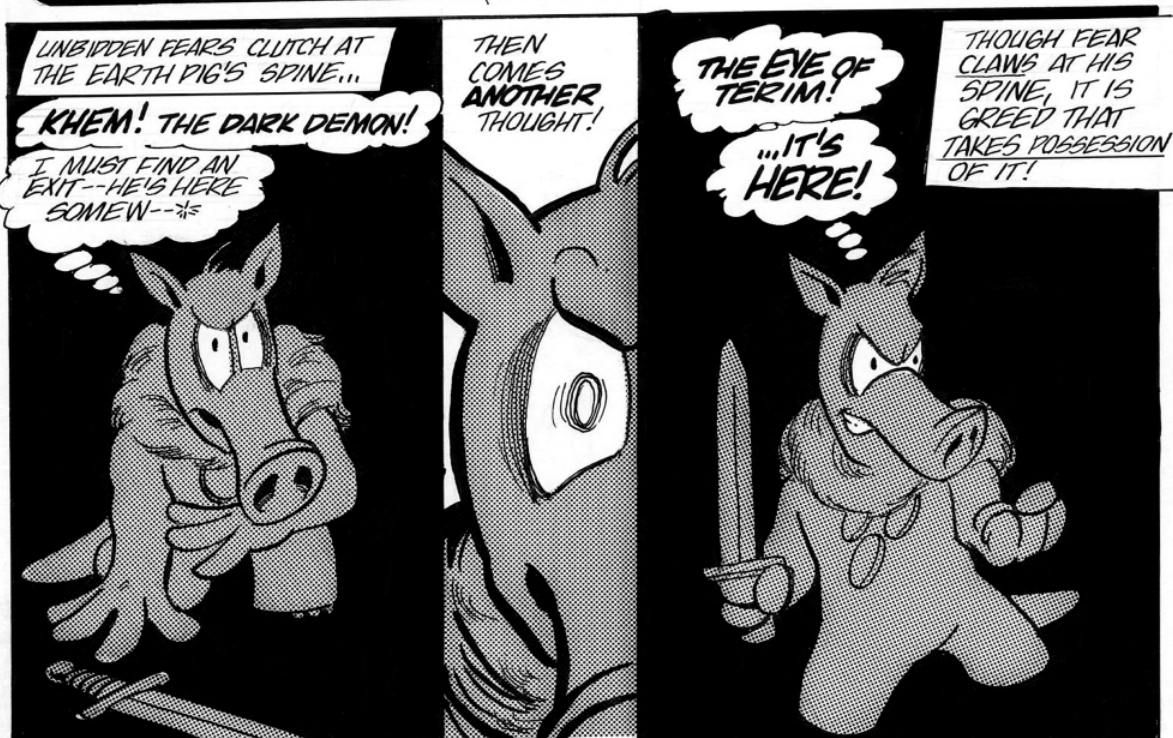
AND ANOTHER SOUND...

A SOUND MUFFLED BY TONS OF ROCK! BUT A SOUND WHICH DOES NOT ESCAPE THE SENSITIVE EARS OF THE EARTH-PIG...



IT IS THE SOUND OF DEEP, SARDONIC LAUGHTER...

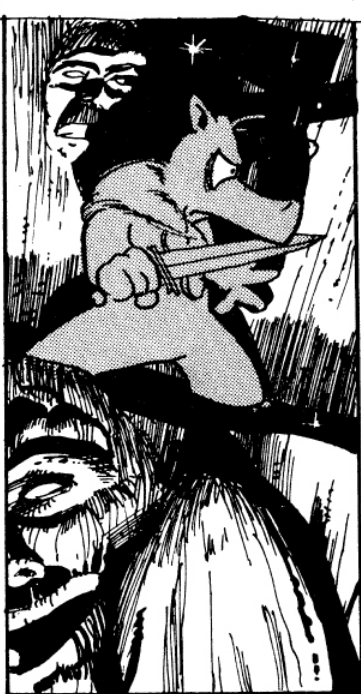




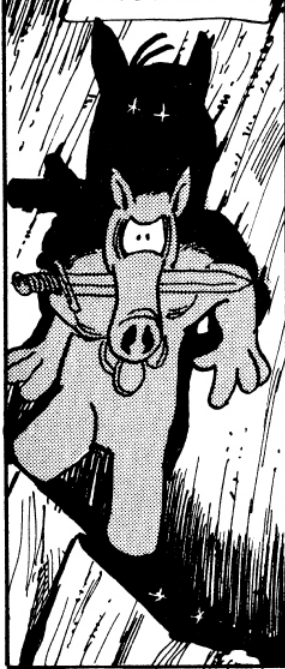
THE PATH THAT
HE TRAVELS
IS WELL WORN
...



...BUT NO LESS TREACHEROUS
FOR ITS AGE! HIS HANDS
PASS OVER **CARVINGS**
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
MANY FACES OF **KHEM...**



WINKING
LIGHTS
FOLLOW HIM,
AS HE GOES,
LIKE SMALL
INSECTS...



THEY
POSE NO
THREAT,
SO THE
AARDVARK
IGNORES
THEM...



THE LIGHT GROWS
IN INTENSITY AS
HE NEARS THE
BOTTOM...

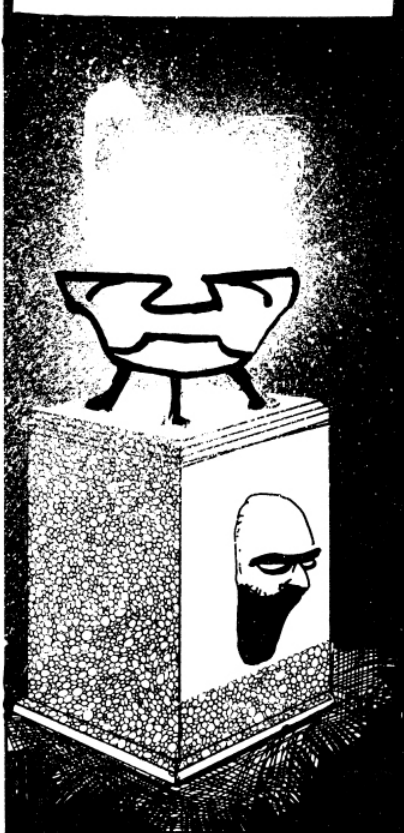
CEREBUS NEARLY LOSES
HIS FOOTING AS HE GETS
HIS FIRST SIGHT OF IT...



THE LEGENDS
HAVE NOT
LIED...



IT IS THE **EVE OF TERIM**,
THE MOST PRECIOUS
OF THE FIVE **SPHERES**
OF THE GODS!...



HIS EYES ARE RIVETED
ON THE BALL OF GOLD
FIRE! IT IS LIKE A
SMALL SUN, BLAZING
IN THE SHADOWS
BELOW HIM!...



HE TRIES TO PICTURE
THE PRICE THAT IT
WOULD FETCH IN THE
GURRANIAN MARKET-
PLACE!...

...AND A SMILE CROSSES
HIS LIPS!...



TARIM!
WHAT A PRIZE!
I'LL BUY A
KINGDOM WITH
THE!...



EH?



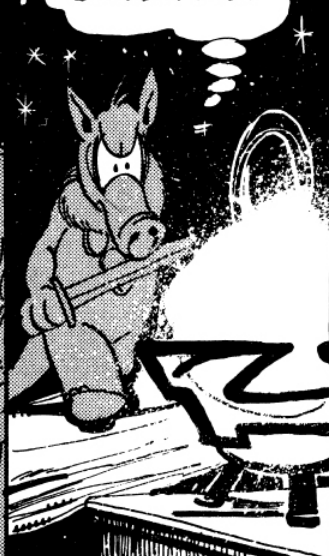
PERHAPS A
WIZARD WOULD
PAY MORE
DEARLY FOR
THE KNOWLEDGE
CONTAINED IN
ONE OF THE
FIVE S!...



CLOVIS'
BLOOD!



CEREBRUS' MIND
IS PLAYING TRICKS
ON HIM -- BUT NO
TRICKS WILL KEEP
ME FROM THE
GOLDEN EYE!





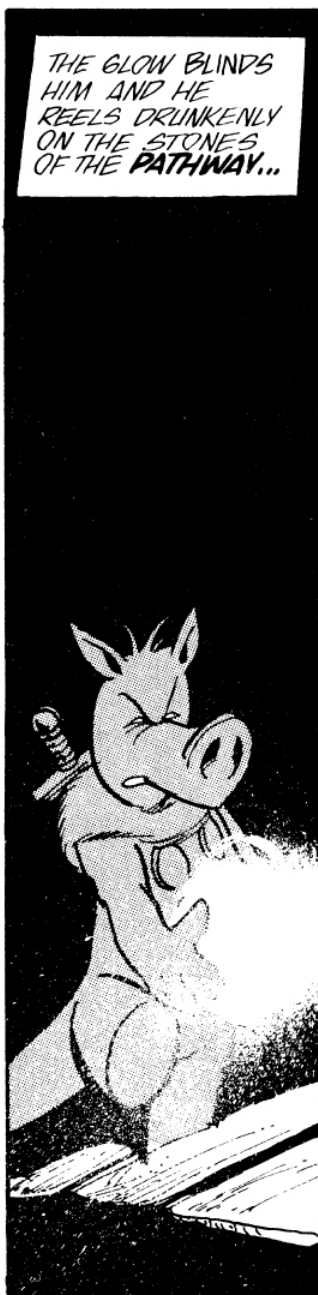
IT IS ONLY
WHEN HE'S
PAST THE ORB
THAT THE
AARDVARK
NOTICES A
DISTANT EXIT...

"KHEM SHALL
HAVE TO FIND
A NEW TREASURE
TO GUARD?" HE
MUSES...

"FOR CEREBUG LAYS CLAIM TO
THE EYE OF TERIM!"

THE AARDVARK
SOON LEARNS
THAT THE
EYE OF A
NORTHERN
GOD IS
WEIGHTY,
INDEED...

CLOVIS'
BEARD!
HOW CAN
SOMETHING
SO SMALL
WEIGH SO
MUCH?



THE GLOW BLINDS
HIM AND HE
REELS DRUNKENLY
ON THE STONES
OF THE **PATHWAY**...



THE GLOWING MOTES WHIM AROUND
HIM LIKE THE INSECTS THEY RESEMBLE,
INCREASING IN NUMBERS WITH EACH
STEP THE EARTH-PIG TAKES...

THE PATH SUDDENLY
DROPS AND THE
AARDVARK STUMBLES
...



...HIS FEET, FOR THE
MOMENT, FINDING
ONLY CRUMBLING
STONES AND AIR!



THE PATH HE HAD SEEN WAS
STRAIGHT! CEREBUS IS
SUDDENLY HESITANT AS HE
RECOVERS HIS BALANCE...



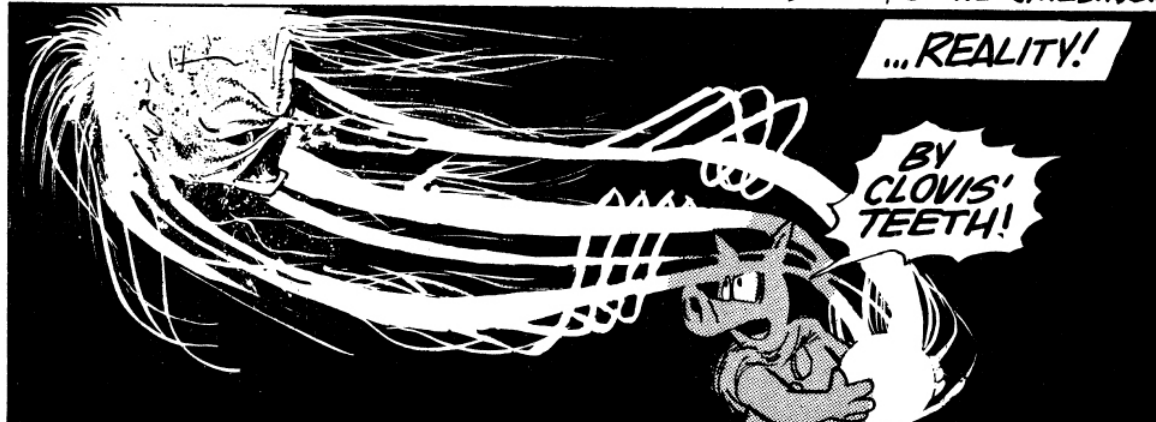
ENERGY! ENERGY LIKE A DARKLING
LATICWORK WOVEN ABOUT HIS
HEAD...



ENERGY-- LIKE FINGERS
WHICH PROBE HIS
MIND; **RENDING--**
SEARCHING...



GONE IS THE BLINDING GLOW IN HIS HANDS-- GONE, TOO, IS THE ILLUSION OF PURITY
AND BEAUTY! IN ITS PLACE ALL THAT REMAINS IS MIND-NUMBING, **SPINE-CHILLING...**



A SUCCUBUS! EVEN AS IT REACHES, CEREBLUS CURSES HIMSELF FOR A FOOL FOR NOT REALIZING IT EARLIER...

THE TENTACLES REACH OUT-- REACH TO STEAL THE AARDVARK'S VERY SOUL...

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN CENTURIES A PREY HAS BROKEN THE SUCCUBUS' SPELL-- HAS **SEEN** IT IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM...

DEFENSELESS, IT SEEKS TO ATTACK CEREBLUS, SHREDDING THE TISSUES OF THE AARDVARK'S MIND... DESPERATION MARKS THE SUCCUBUS' MOVEMENTS...

THE NATURE OF THIS BEAST IS DIFFERENT FROM ITS OTHER VICTIMS-- THE SOUL **MUST** BE FOUND BEFORE... BEFORE...

THE EARTH-PIG STUMBLES AND PLUNGES HEAD-LONG INTO THE UNKNOWN ONCE MORE...

STILL, THE TENTACLES FLIP AND DART ABOUT THE TUMBLING FORM SEEKING... **SEEKING**...

CEREBLUS TWISTS, DISORIENTED... AWARE ONLY OF A PULLING, TEARING SENSATION...

WHERE IS ITS SOUL?

THE AARDVARK BOLINCES, SHRINKING BACK FROM THE TENTACLES! HE SEES THEM TWIST HELPLESSLY...

WHERE?

HE SEES THE WINKING LIGHTS RETURN, SURROUNDING HIM, AS HE DROPS INTO SPACE...

A MOMENT LATER, ALL GOES **BLACK!**...

NO! NO! NO!

AN INSTANT--OR AN HOUR--
LATER, CEREBUS AWAKENS
TO THE SOUND OF WHINING
SCREAMS AND A RUSH OF
WIND LIKE BIRDS IN
FLIGHT...

HIS EYES SLOWLY FOCUS ON THE
TARNISHED IRON SPHERE BEFORE
HIM, HALF-BURIED IN THE SNOW

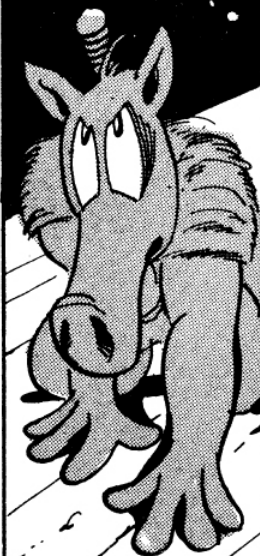


ABOVE HIM, WINKING
LIGHTS SWIRL
UPWARD, MINGLING
WITH THE EVENING
STARS...

THE SOUND IS
UNMISTAKABLE!

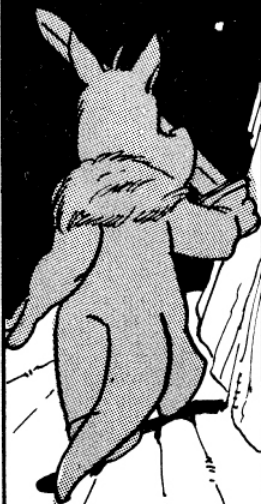


IT IS THE SOUND
OF SUDDEN
FREEDOM AFTER
CENTURIES OF
CAPTIVITY...

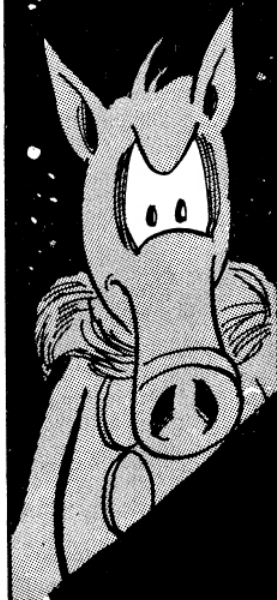


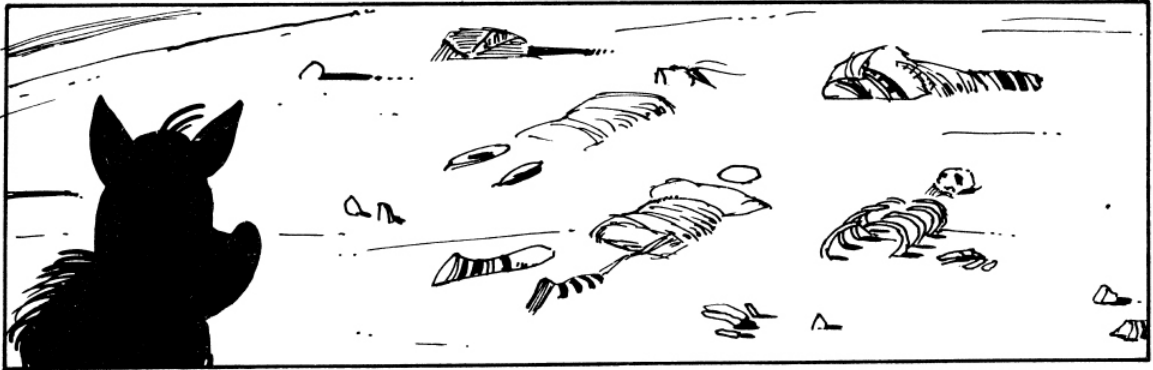
IT IS NOT A SOUND
FOR THE EARS
OF A MORTAL
EARTH-PIG, THOUGH,
AND CEREBUS
TURNS...

WONDERING FOR
THE MOMENT
WHERE HE IS...

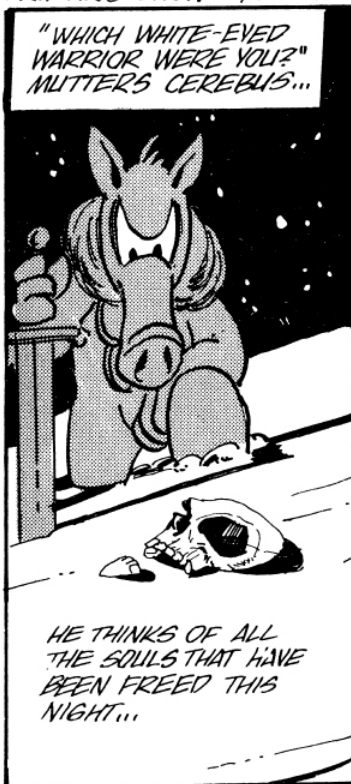


BUT ONLY
FOR A MOMENT
...





IT IS THE SITE OF THE DAY'S BATTLE! CORPSES ARE GRADUALLY BEING COVERED BY DRIFTING SNOW--INCONGRUOUS SKELETONS VISIBLE AMID THE BOREALAN DEAD...



"WHICH WHITE-EYED WARRIOR WERE YOU?" MUTTERS CEREBUS...

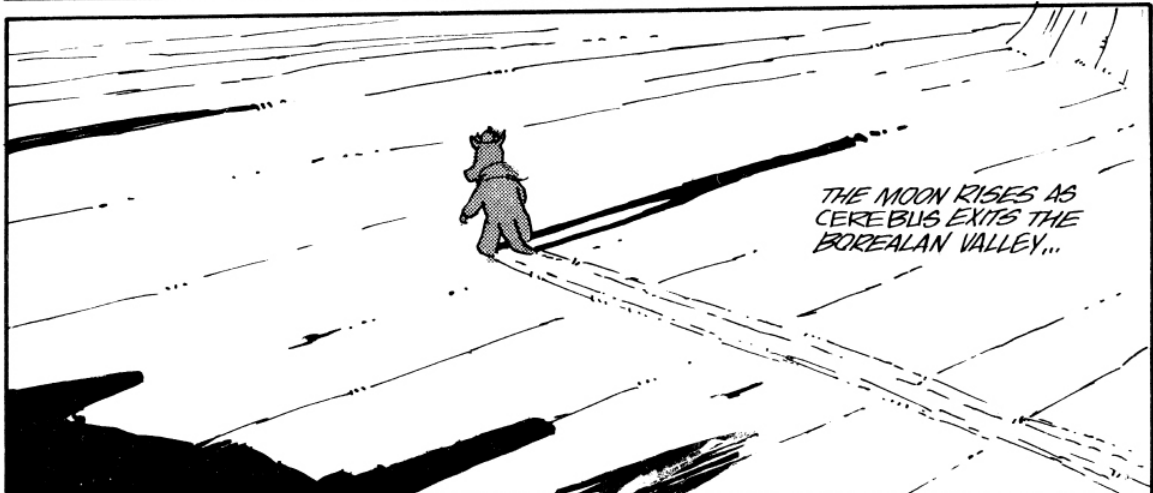
HE THINKS OF ALL THE SOULS THAT HAVE BEEN FREED THIS NIGHT...



HOW MANY HAD FALLEN PREY TO THE SUCCLIBUS' DECEPTION?



HOW MANY OTHER SOUL-LESS WARRIORS HAVE CRUMBLLED TO SKELETONS? HOW MANY OTHERS ARE AT LAST **RESTING** IN THE NEW FALLEN SNOW?-- NO LONGER IN MINDLESS FLIGHT -- NO LONGER DESTROYING ALL IN THEIR PATH?...



THE MOON RISES AS CEREBUS EXITS THE BOREALAN VALLEY...

HE BREATHES DEEPLY... AND CONSIDERS HIS FATE; SAVED BY VIRTUE OF HIS UNUSUAL NATURE...

...ELSE HE MIGHT BE LANGLISHING NOW, IN THAT GLOOMY CAVERN WITH THE OTHER TRAPPED SOULS...

...AWAITING A SAVIOUR TO BREAK THE SUCCUBUS' CONTROL!

EVEN NOW, THE SUCCUBUS MUST BE ATTRACTING NEW VICTIMS, HE MUSES...

...AND THEN TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO MORE **URGENT** CONCERNS!

...FOR HIS BELLY AND PURSE ARE EMPTY...

THE NEAREST COAST IS TWELVE MILES...

THE NEAREST PORT AT LEAST TWICE THAT DISTANCE!

...AND THE EARTH-PIG INTENDS TO QUAFF A DOZEN ALES AND START AS MANY BRAWLS BEFORE ANOTHER MOON HAS RISEN!



FIN

SONG RED SOPHIA

זיין
אין

BELOVED,
PERHAPS WE COULD
SLIP INTO THOSE
BLUSHES FOR A FEW
MINUTES AND...

TARIM'S BLOOD!
DOES THIS WENCH
THINK OF **NAUGHT**
ELSE?

CEREBUS SHIFTS LINEARLY,
STRAINING TO SEE PAST
THE CONCEALING FOLIAGE
--TO CATCH SIGHT OF
HIS QUIARKY...

AS HE DOES SO, HE
THINKS BACK TO HIS
MEETING WITH HENROT
NOT SO LONG AGO...

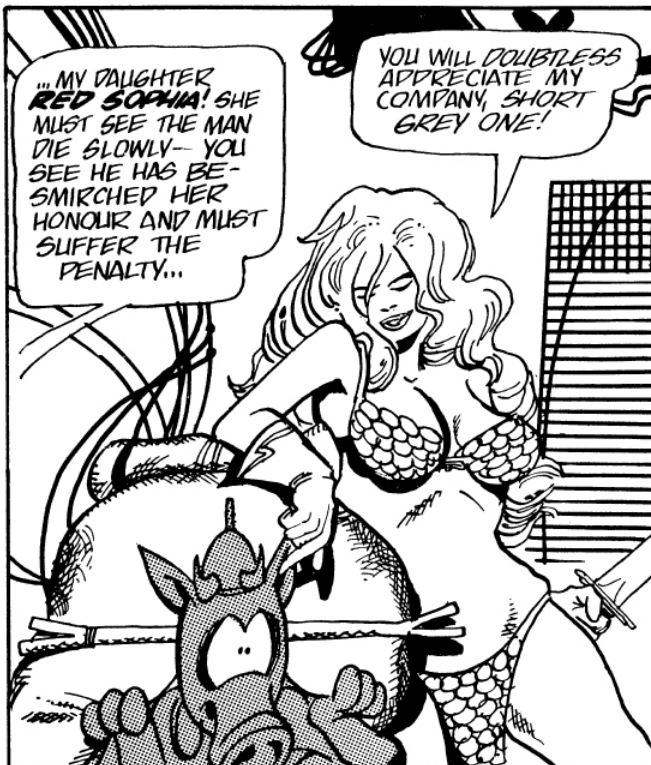
... NOT SO VERY
LONG AGO AT
ALL!

"TRUE TO HIS VOW, CEREBUS REACHES THE COASTAL PORT OF TEMZA BEFORE DARKNESS FALLS AGAIN! THERE IS BAD NEWS IN THE TAVERNS, THOUGH! THE BOREALAN GOLD MINES ARE SAID TO BE FAILING AND THE NEARLY BANKRUPT GOVERNMENT IS PRESSING MERCENARIES INTO SERVICE ON PAIN OF DEATH! DESPERATION HAS DRIVEN THE AARDVARK TO FIND A QUICK SOURCE OF INCOME TO BUY HIM SAFE PASSAGE EAST. AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGEMENT HE GOES BACK TO TANSUBAL, THERE TO MEET WITH HENROT, A VERY POWERFUL WIZARD, SAID TO DRAW HIS POWER FROM, NOT ONE, BUT **TWO** OF THE FIVE SPHERES OF THE GODS..."



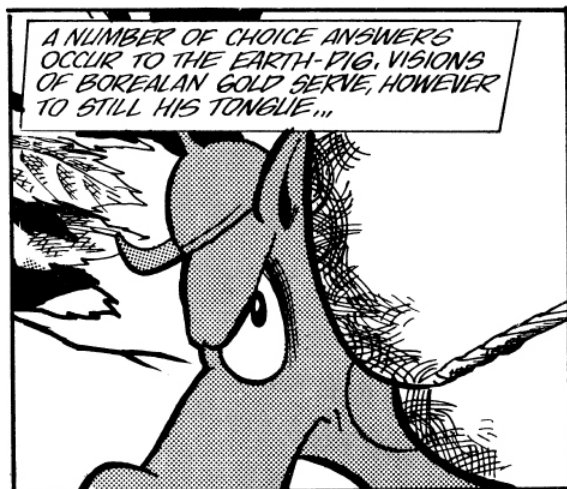


LOOKS LIKE YOU
HAVE EVERYTHING!
THERE'S ONE
MORE THING I
FORGOT TO
MENTION...



... MY DAUGHTER
RED SOPHIA! SHE
MUST SEE THE MAN
DIE SLOWLY-- YOU
SEE HE HAS BE-
SMIRCHED HER
HONOUR AND MUST
SUFFER THE
PENALTY...

YOU WILL DOUBTLESS
APPRECIATE MY
COMPANY, **SHORT
GREY ONE!**



A NUMBER OF CHOICE ANSWERS
OCCUR TO THE EARTH-PIG. VISIONS
OF BOREALAN GOLD SERVE, HOWEVER
TO STILL HIS TONGUE...



YOU NEEDN'T
WORRY ABOUT HER
... SHE'S QUITE
HANDY WITH THAT
SWORD...

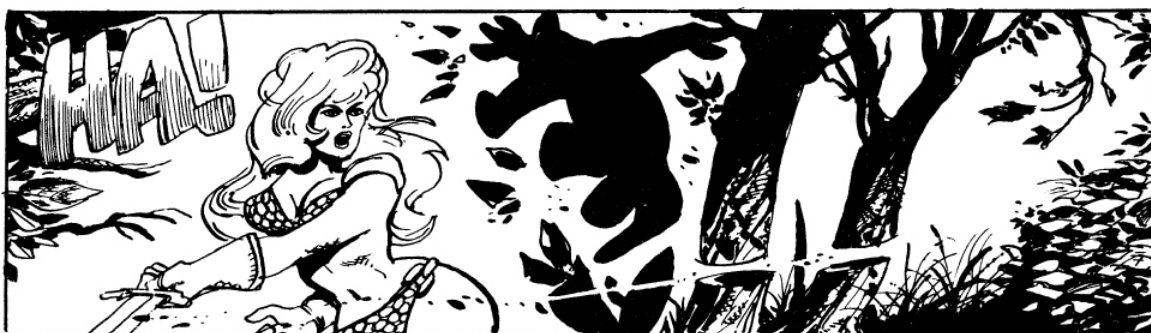
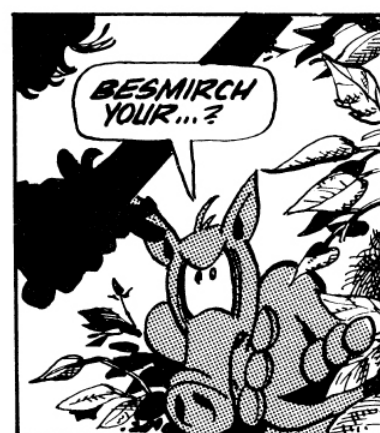
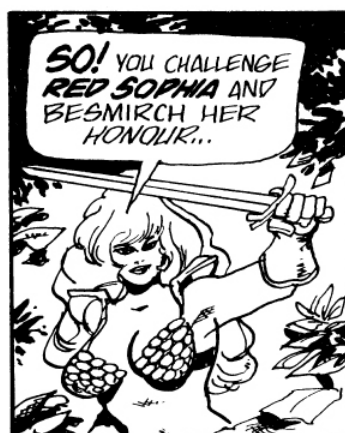
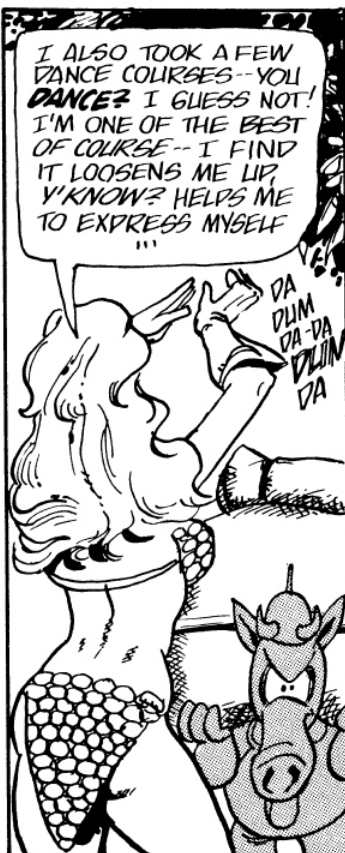


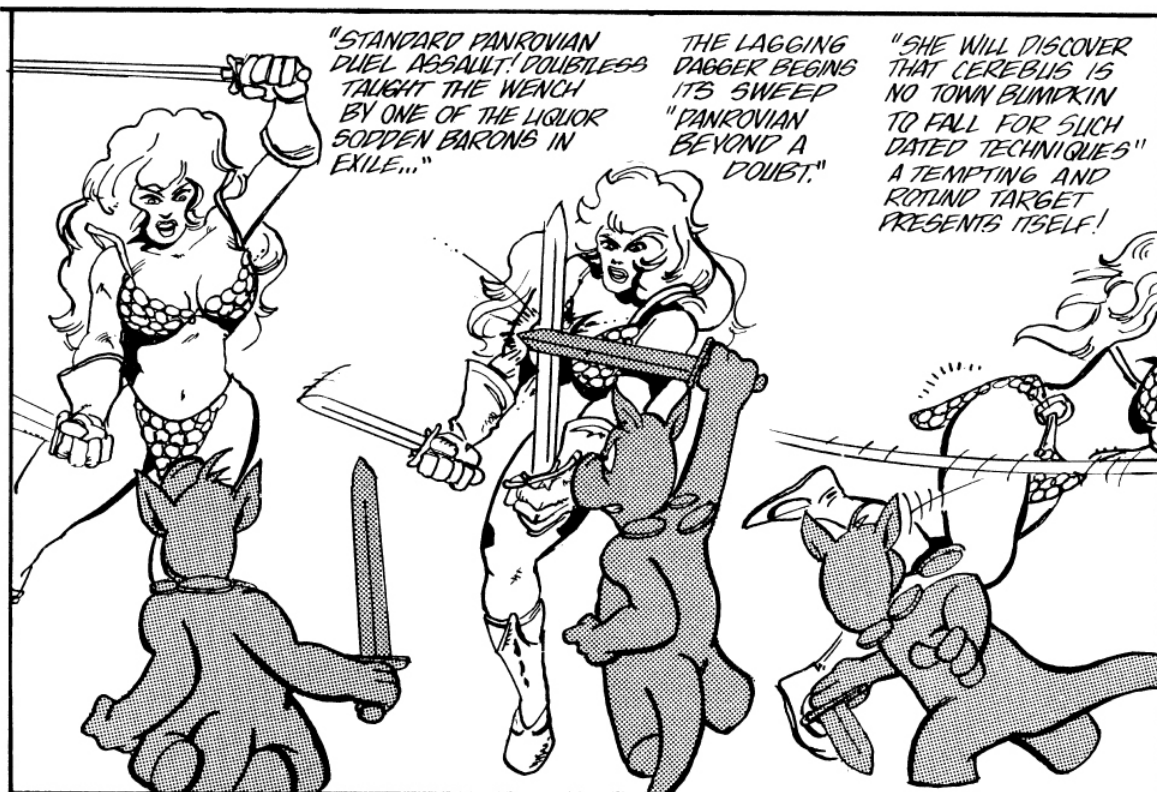
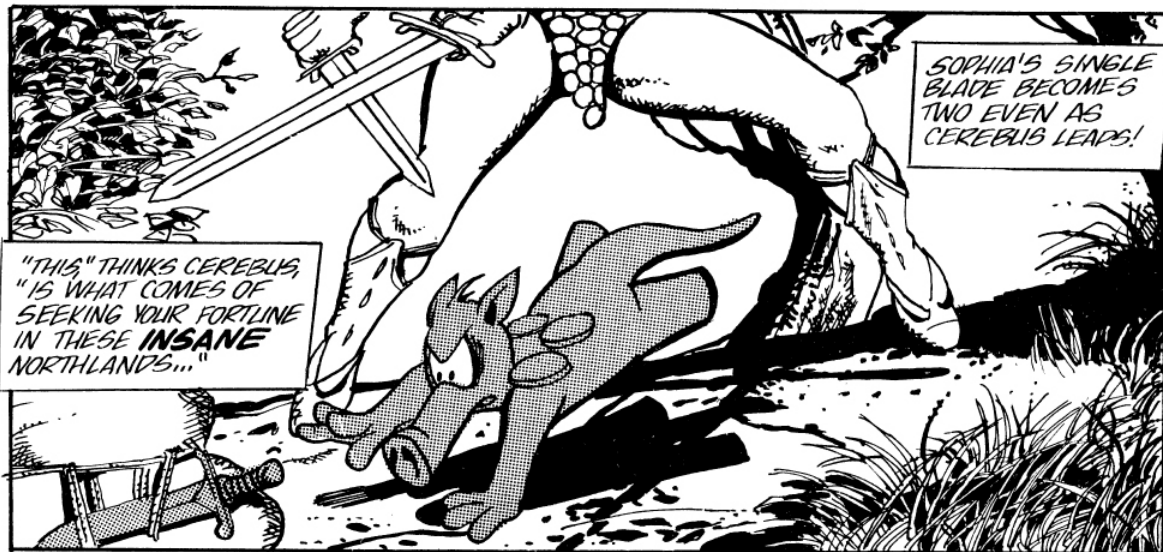
GOODBYE,
FATHER!

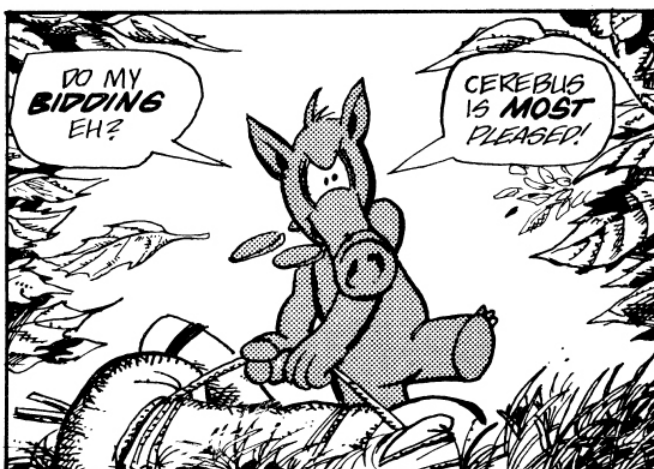
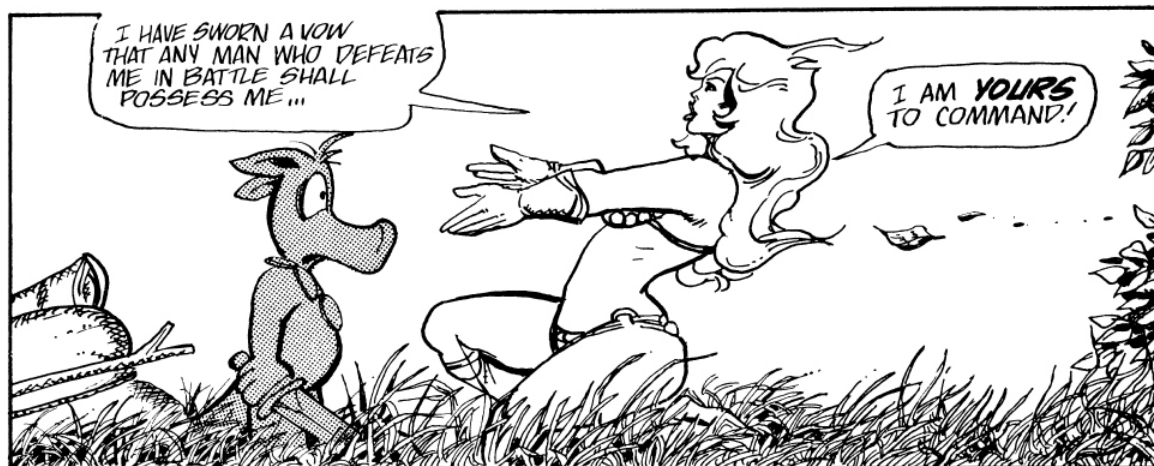
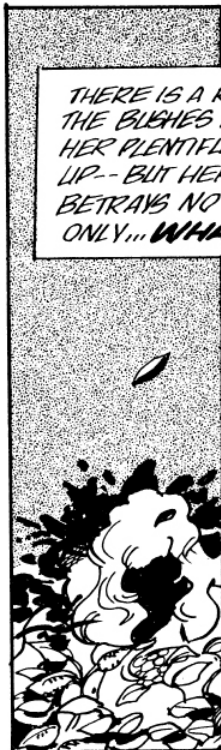
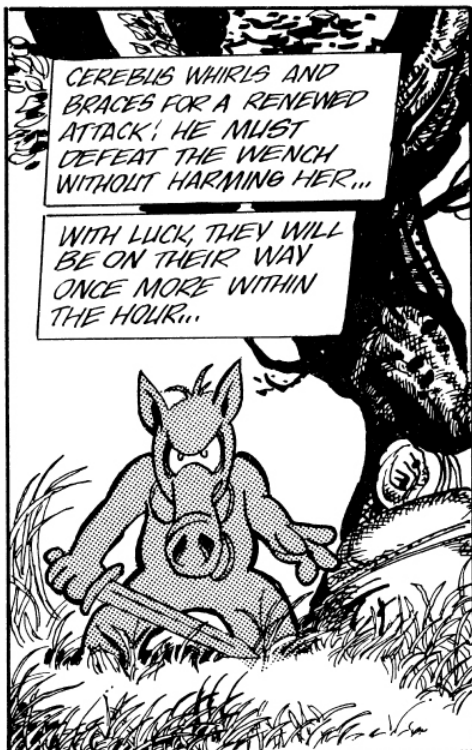
GOODBYE, **SOPHIA!**
TAK'IM BE WITH YOU,
CEREBUS...

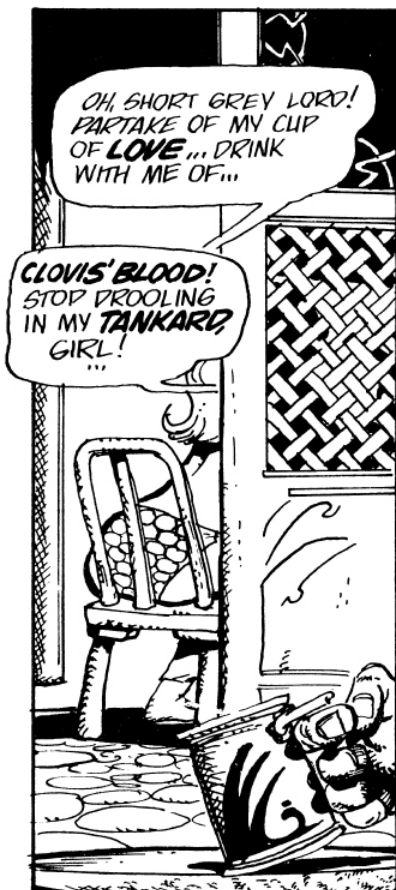
GRUMBLE-
GRUMBLE- NO
GIVING

FOR THE EARTH-PIG, THE ENSUING YARDS PASS LIKE MILES AS SOPHIA BEGINS TO RELATE HER LIFE STORY...

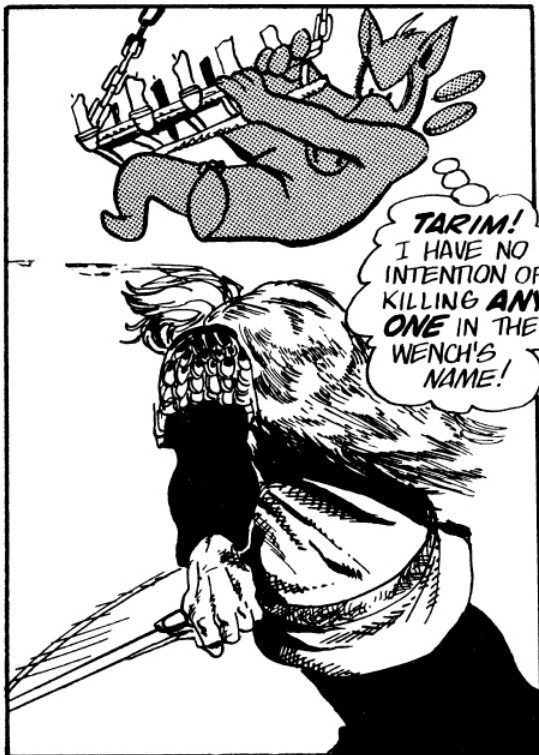




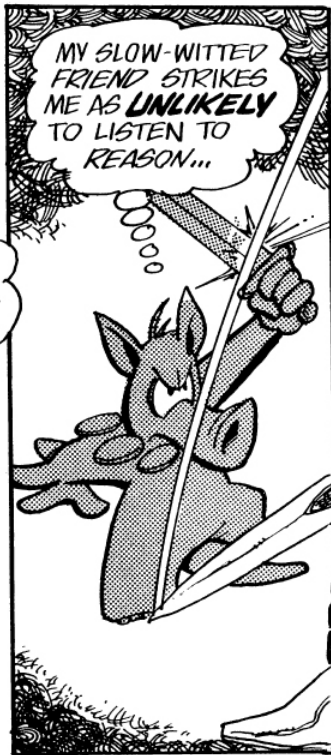








TARIM!
I HAVE NO
INTENTION OF
KILLING **ANY-
ONE** IN THE
WENCH'S
NAME!



MY SLOW-WITTED
FRIEND STRIKES
ME AS **UNLIKELY**
TO LISTEN TO
REASON...



MAYHAP
IT IS TIME
FOR CEREBUS
TO DEMONSTRATE
THERE'S MORE
THAN ONE WAY
TO FELL A
BEARDED
TREE

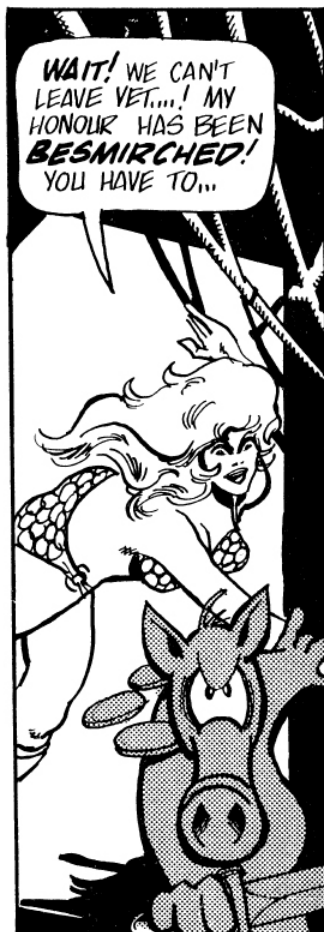


FORTUNATELY, THUGG'S SIZE
MAKES HIM EXTREMELY
Ponderous AND SLOW-
MOVING! AS WELL, HIS
CONTEMPT FOR THOSE
SHORTER THAN HIMSELF
MAKES HIM AN IDEAL FOE
FOR THE **EARTH PIG!**

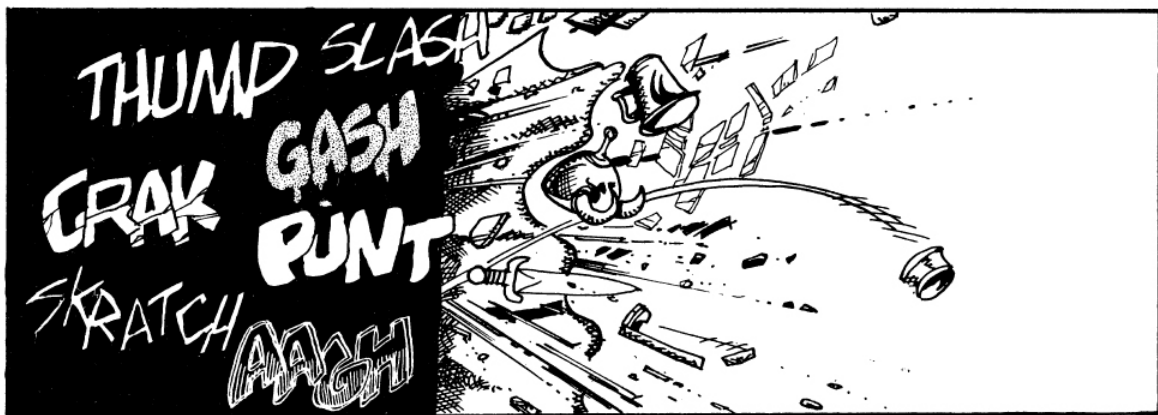
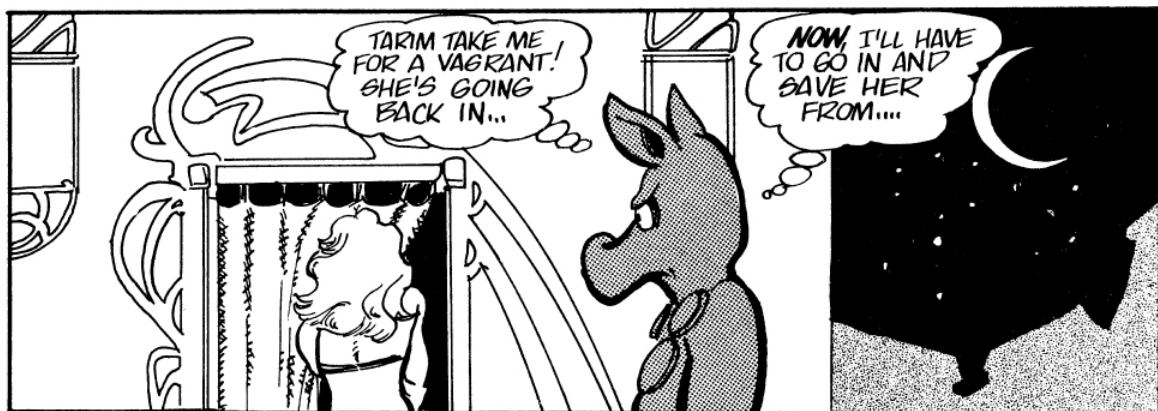
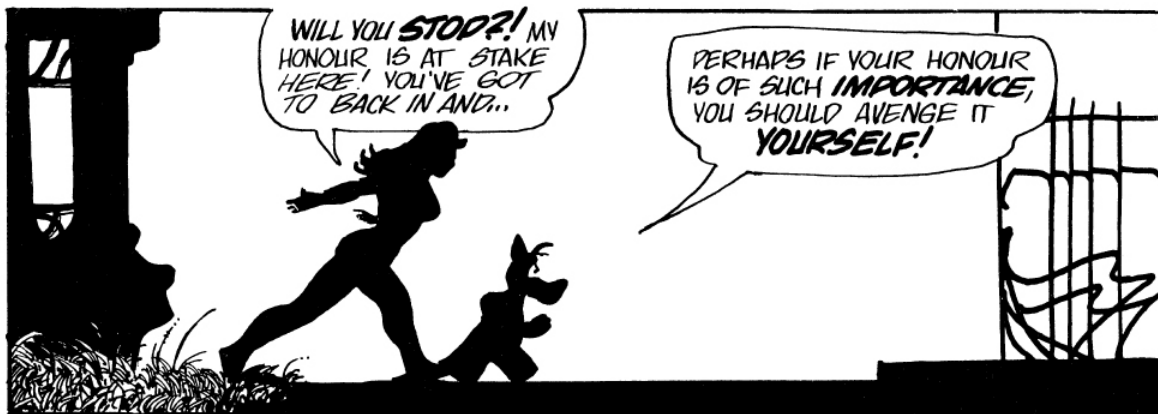
CEREBUS SPOTS AN
OPENING, AND...

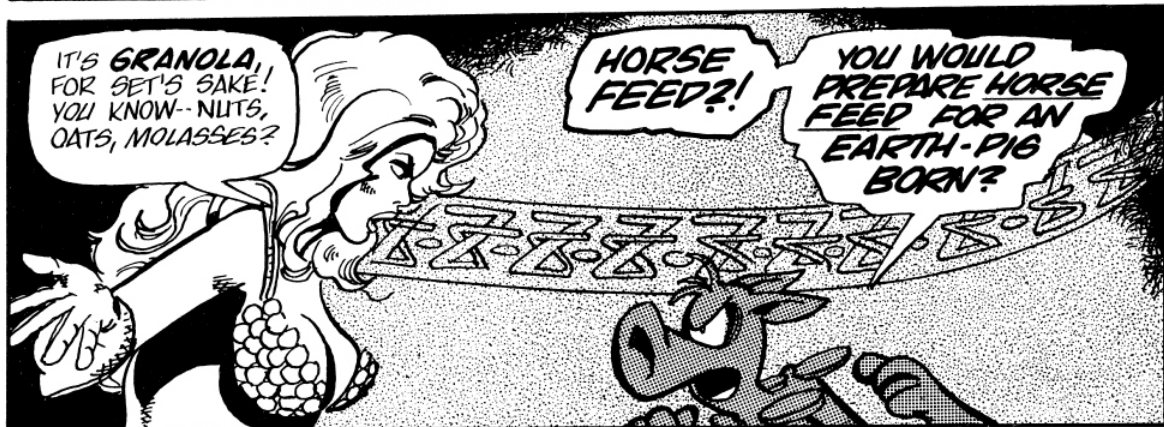
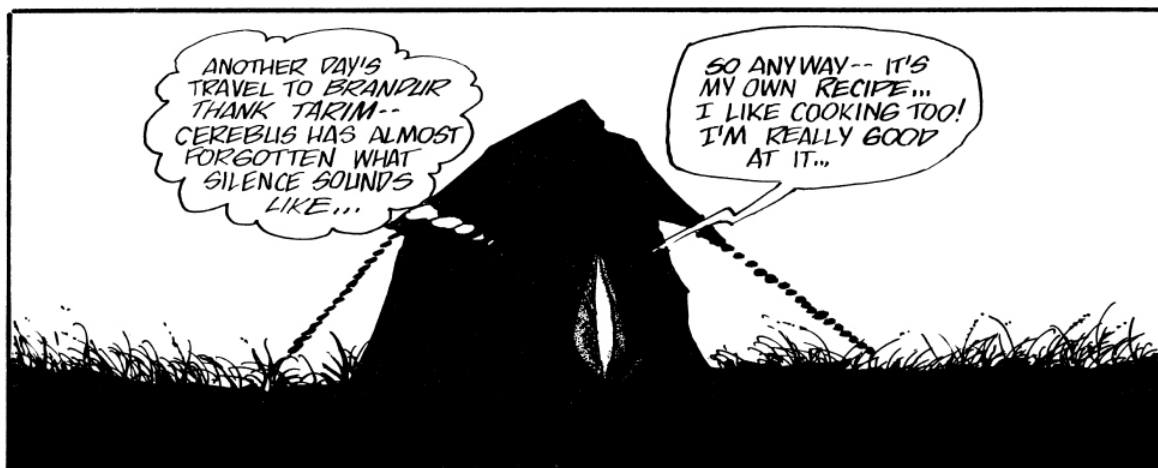


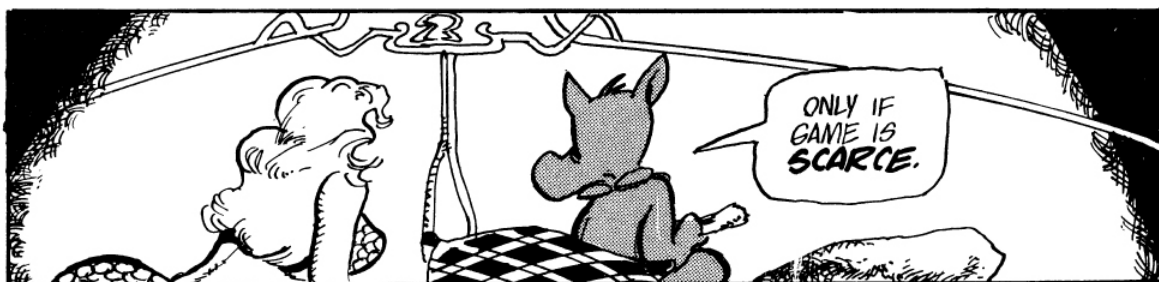
THUGG



WAIT! WE CAN'T
LEAVE YET...! MY
HONOUR HAS BEEN
BESMIRCHED!
YOU HAVE TO...







NO LONGER ENCLUMBERED
BY THE SUPPLIES FOR WHICH
THEY INTEND TO RETURN
SOPHIA AND CEREBLIS
MAKE BETTER TIME
TOWARDS **BRANPUR**

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND
IT! YOU BEAT ME IN
BATTLE AND YET YOU
WON'T LET ME
SERVE YOU...!



ON MY FATHER'S
LIFE, I VOW TO
DO **ANYTHING**
THAT WILL PLEASE
YOU, **EARTH-PIG**
MASTER...



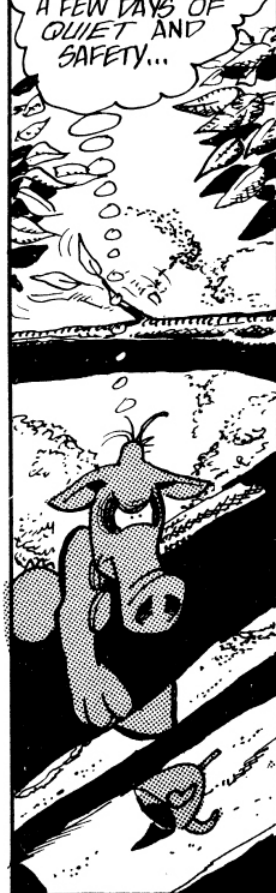
HOW ABOUT A
TAIL MASSAGE
...OR MAYBE
I COULD SEW
SEQUINS ON
YOUR HELMET?

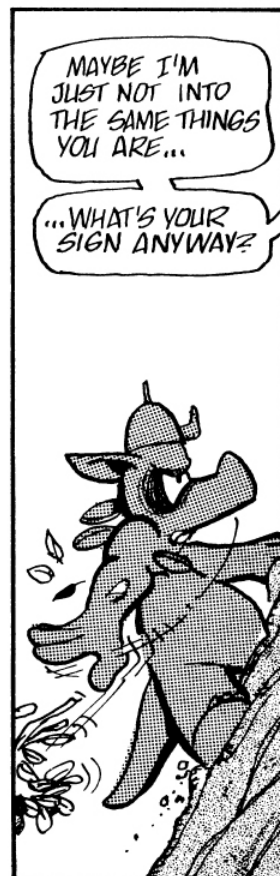
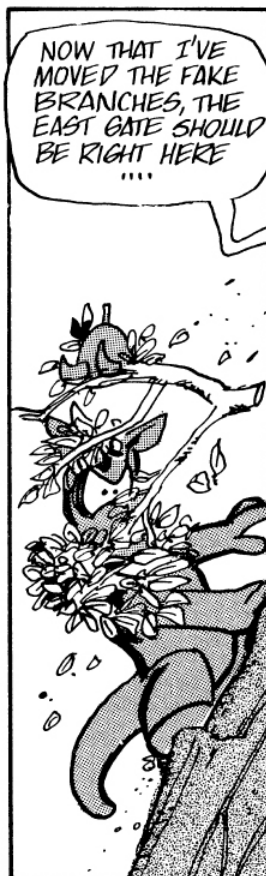
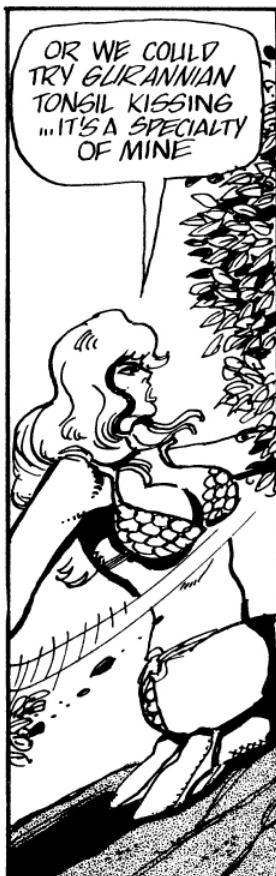
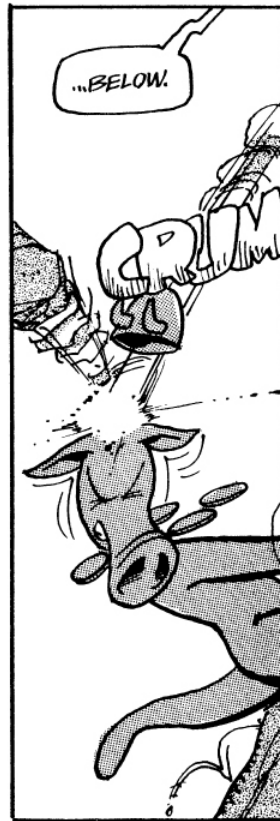
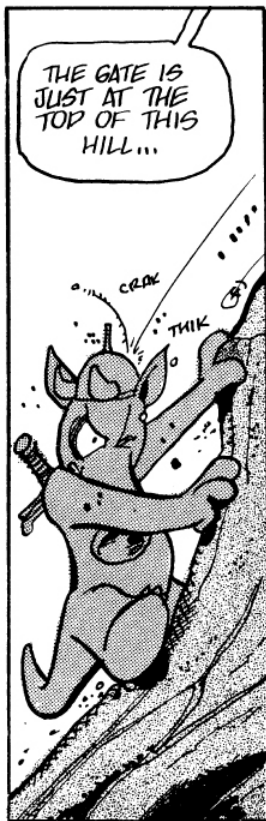


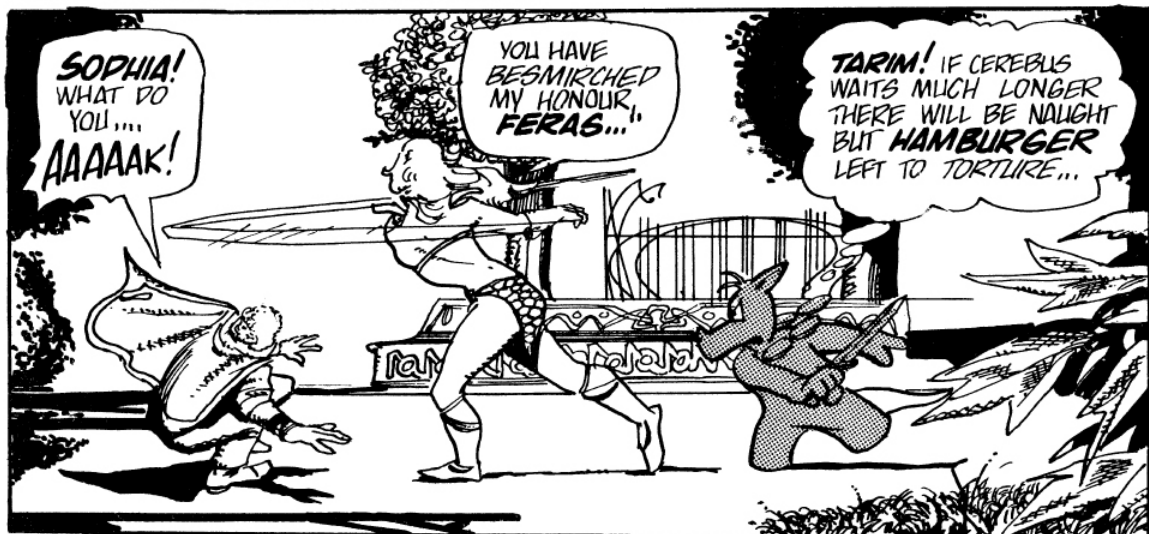
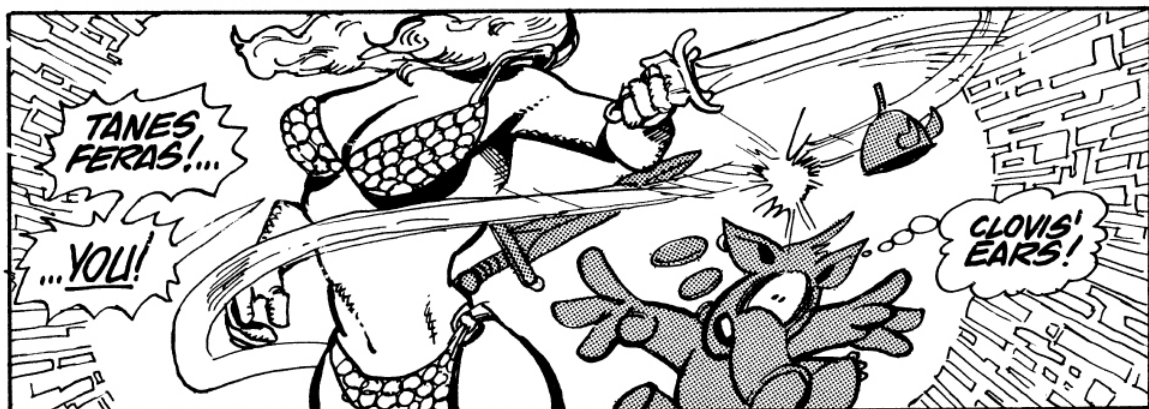
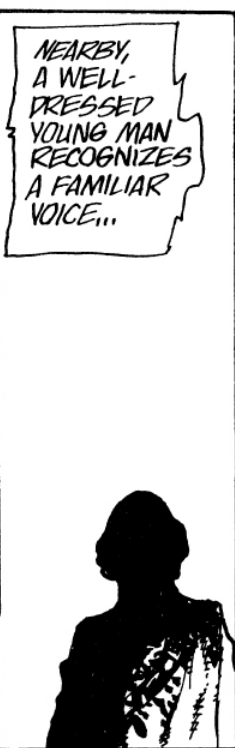
MAYBE YOU'D
LIKE A MON-
OGRAMMED
HANDKERCHIEF
SET?

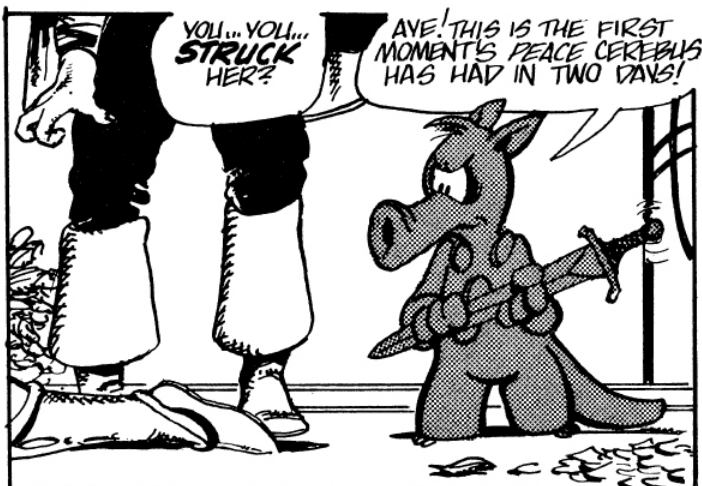
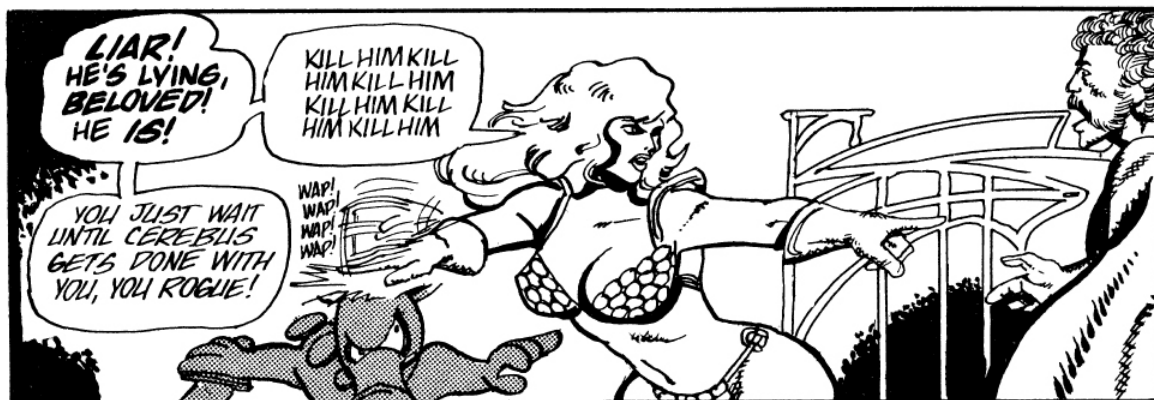


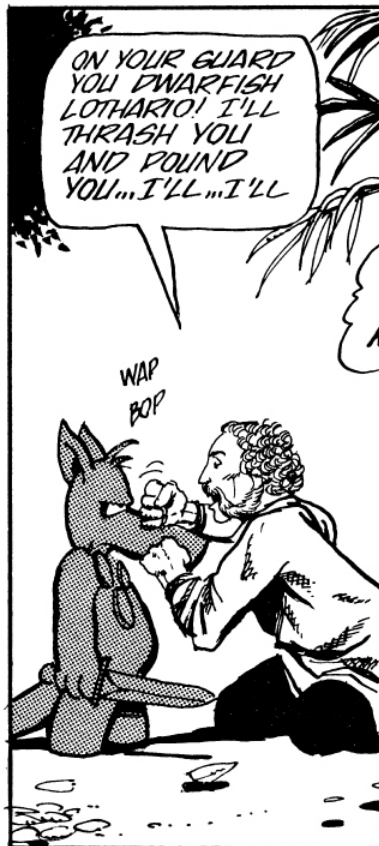
THERE
APPEARS TO
BE METHOD TO
HENROT'S MAD-
NESS -- A SACK OF
GOLD IS A SMALL
PRICE TO PAY FOR
A FEW DAYS OF
QUIET AND
SAFETY...

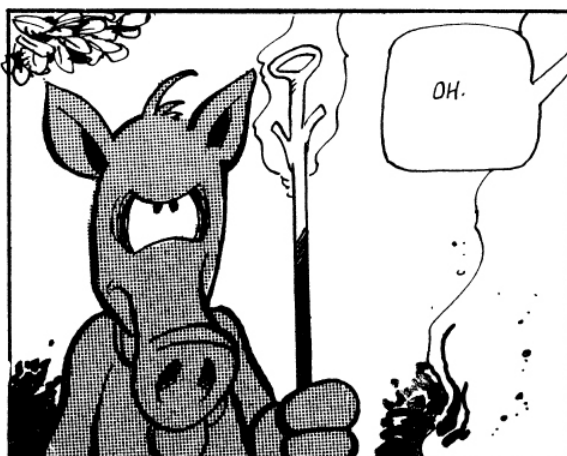
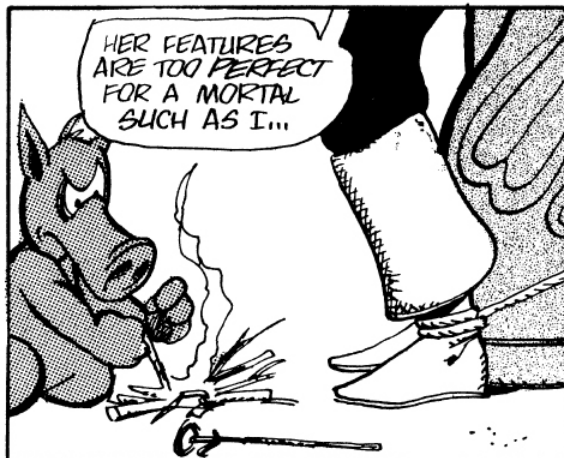
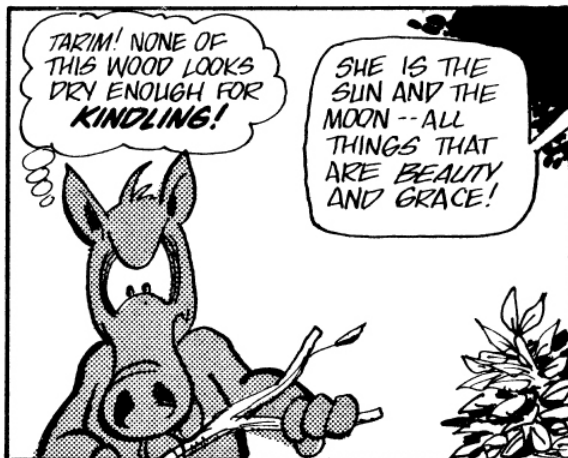


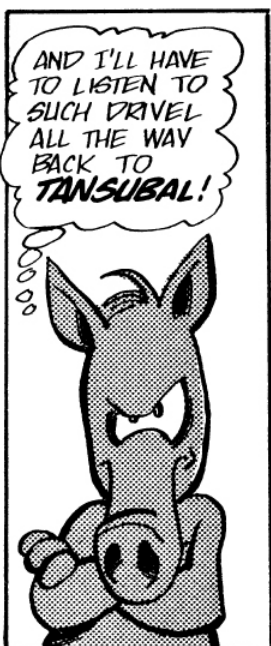
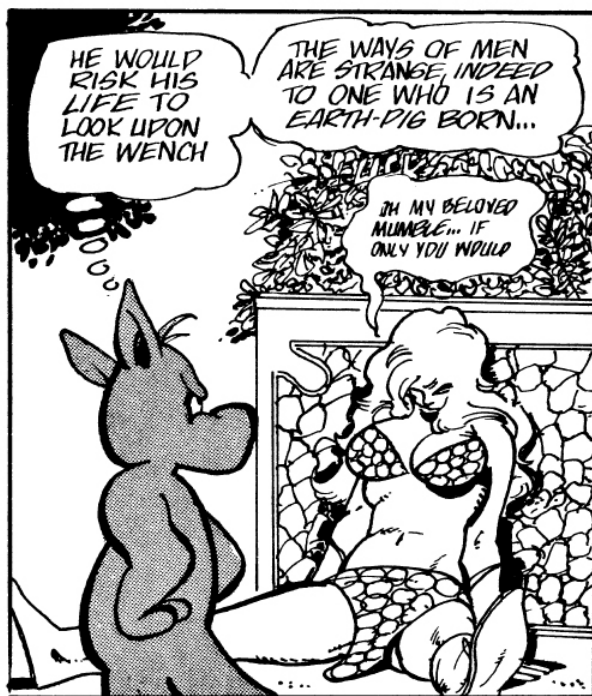












EPILOGUE

SO IT IS THAT THE
NEXT DAY FINDS
HENROT ENJOYING
THE NOON SUN AND
ALTERING THE ATOMIC
STRUCTURE OF THE
OCCASIONAL INSECT...

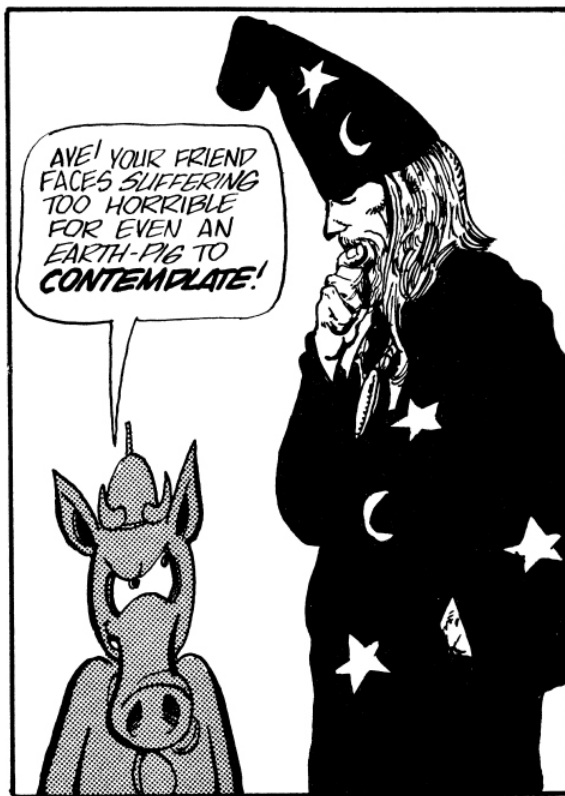
THERE IS SOMETHING
AMISS -- SOMETHING
HE HAS TROUBLE
PLUTTING A WIZARDLY
FINGER ON...

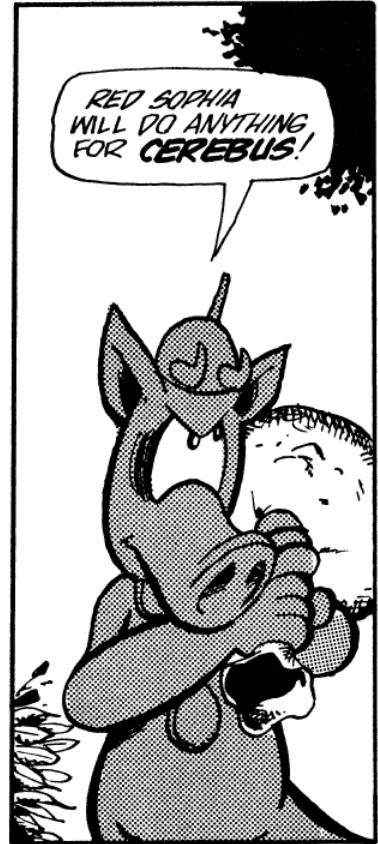
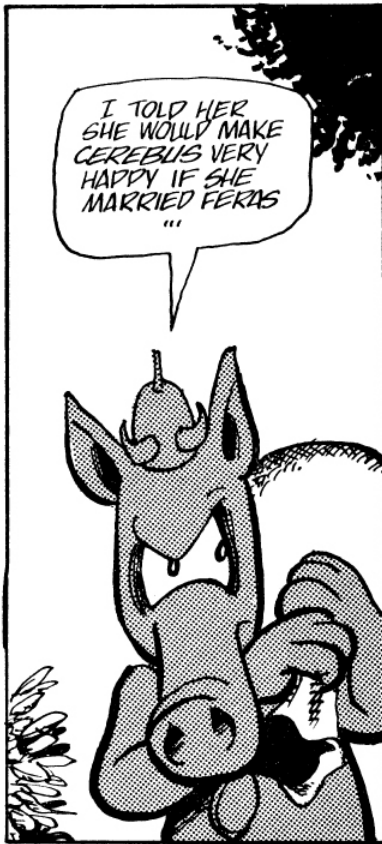
A SMALL SOUND
ATTRACTS HIS
ATTENTION....

EH? THE EARTH-PIG
...BUT NO SOPHIA? CAN
IT BE THAT... NO -- THE
INDICATORS WERE
TOO **STRONG**...

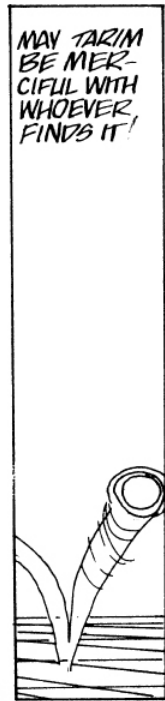
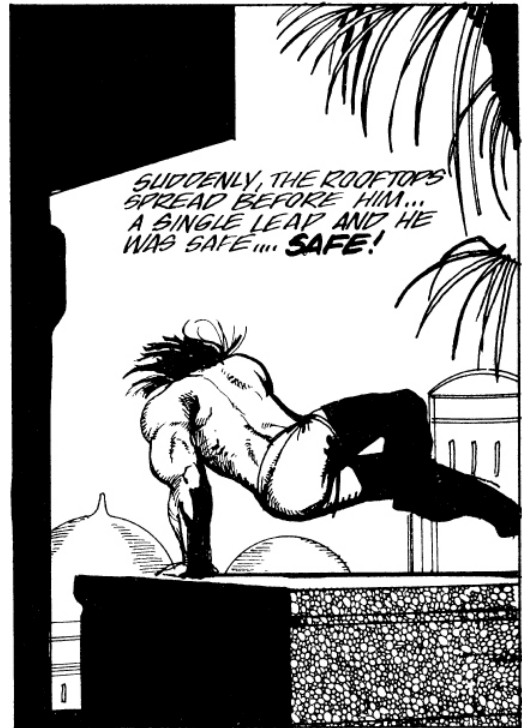
IF HE AGREED TO
BRING **SUFFERING**
TO FERAS, HE HAS
DONE SO!







cerebus the aardvark



DEATH'S DARK TREAD

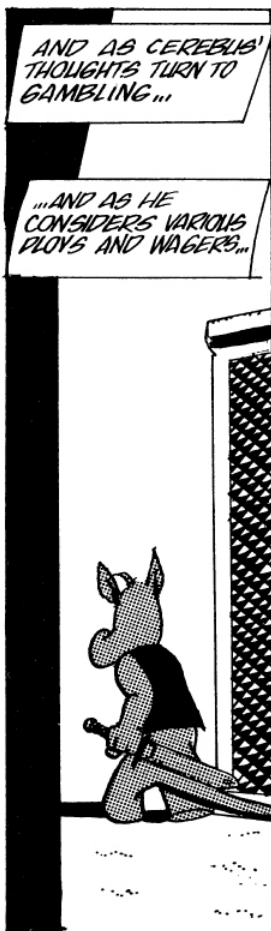
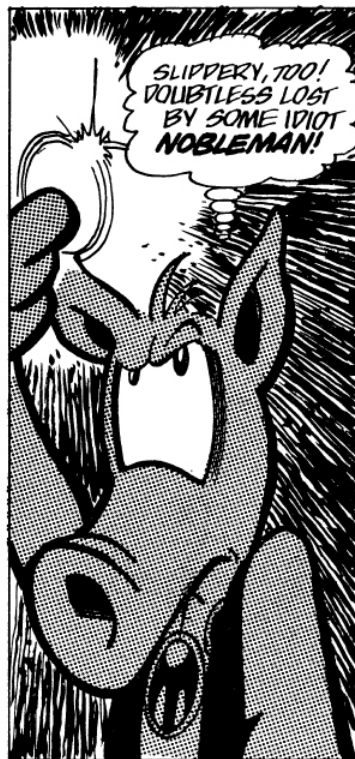
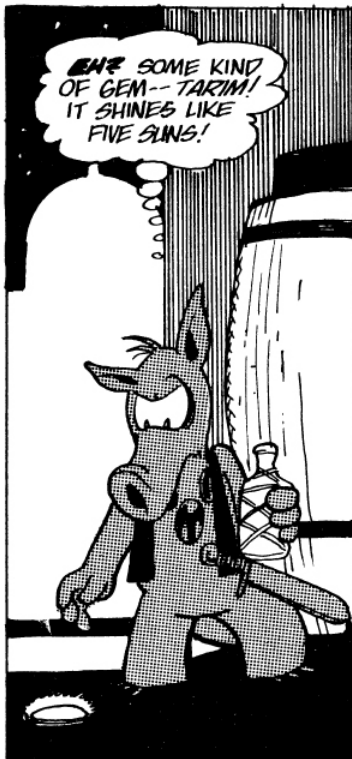
USING HENROT'S GOLD, CEREBUS BRIBES HIS WAY ONTO A MERCHANT VESSEL ON THE SOFIM RIVER. A WEEK LATER, HE IS WITHIN THE SEPTRAN EMPIRE'S BOUNDARIES, POSING AS A TRADER IN TEXTILES! AT SERREA, THE INFORMAL CAPITAL OF THE LOOSELY-KNIT AND MILITANT EMPIRE, THE EARTH-PIG SEES HIS CHANCE FOR A MUCH-NEEDED VACATION! HE LOSES HIMSELF AMID THE BUSTLING CROWDS AND, WITH THE LAST OF HIS BOREALAN GOLD, SETS ABOUT THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF DRINKING, EATING AND GAMBLING...

THE EYE,
BY ITS
NATURE, IS
ATTRACTED
TO BRIGHT
OBJECTS.

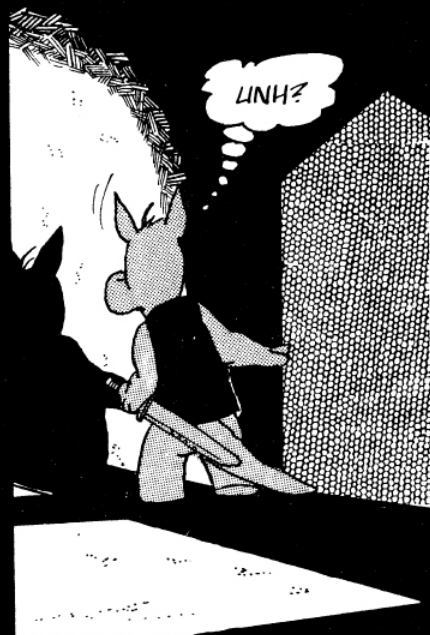
THIS EFFECT, AIDED BY
THE BETTER HALF OF
A PINT BOTTLE OF
APRICOT BRANDY...

...TENDS TO BE
SOMEWHAT...
ENHANCED!





THE EARTH-PIG TURNS A CORNER, COMING **ABRUPTLY** FACE-TO-FACE WITH A WITH ONE OF COUNTLESS **DEAD ENDS** IN THIS SOUTHERN METROPOLIS...



FROM NOW ON, CEREBIUS WILL SLAKE HIS THIRST WITH ALES AND MEADS!



THESE CITY WINES MAY TASTE LIKE FRUIT JUICE, BUT THEY WREAK HAVOC WITH MY...#



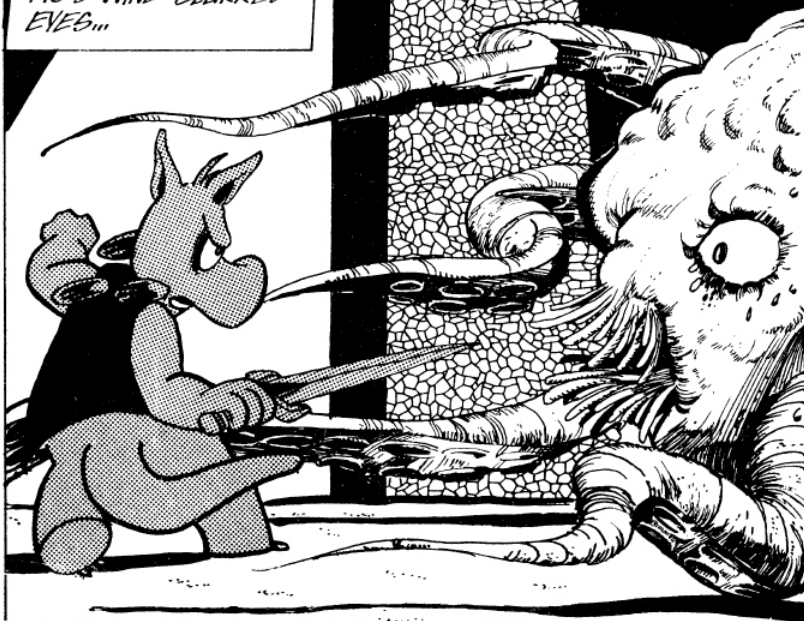
CLOVIS' TEETH AND TANKARD!



THE SHORT BLADE GLITTERS PULLY IN THE HALF-LIGHT...

THOUGH THERE IS A MERCLESS THROBBING BEHIND THE EARTH-PIG'S WINE-BLURRED EYES...

...INGRAINED SKILLS INSTANTLY DICTATE HIS ACTIONS...



"SOON" MURMURS **DEATH**, "SOON THE GEM WILL BE **MINE!**"

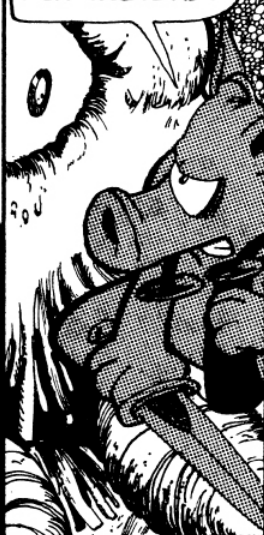


"ONCE THE CRAWLER HERDS THIS PREY TO-
WARD ME, IT
WILL BE CHILD'S
PLAY TO GET
THE GEM IN
MY HANDS..."



CEREBUS SENSES
YOU WISH HIM TO
RUN, **DEVIL SPAWN!**

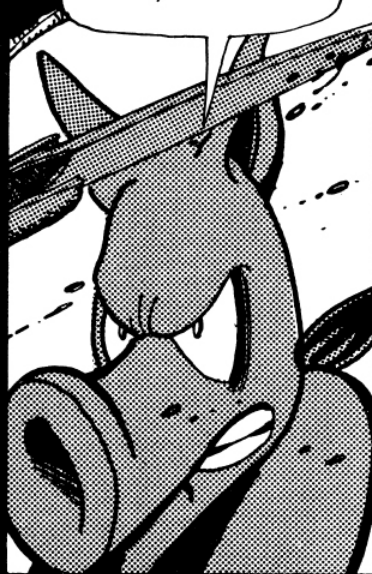
...BUT WHAT IF
I CHOOSE TO
FIGHT **INSTEAD?**



"A MOST 'VALIANT'
WORM," CHUCKLES
DEATH, "IF HE RE-
FUSES TO RUN, THEN
THE CRAWLER WILL
REMOVE THE GEM
AND LEAVE IT
FOR ANOTHER
TO FIND!"



I AM NO CITY-
BRED MORSEL-FOR-
THE-TAKING! ... YOU
FACE AN EARTH PIG
BORN, **DEMON!**



"**AMAZING!** BUT
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE
FOR HIM TO
DEFEAT THE
CRAWLER! NO
MATTER HOW..."



WOLINDER, EH,
MONSTER? YOUR
MAW GAPES TO
DEVOUR ME...

MAYHAP
INSTEAD...



"BY THE FIVE
SPHERES," **DEATH**
HISSES, ONE BROW
ARCHING SLIGHTLY...



...YOU SHALL
**FEED ON
THIS!...**



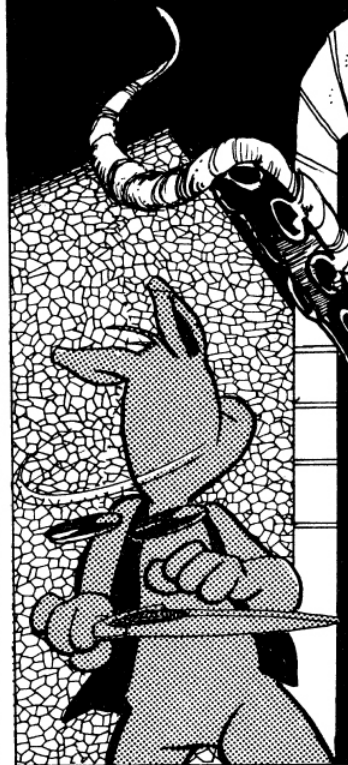
"A CREATURE FROM THE
DAWN OF TIME, A
CREATURE OF SORCERY
... BREATHING ITS
LAST..."

"DEFEATED BY MERE
FLESH AND BLOOD AND
IRON..."

"...AND STILL, I DO NOT
POSSESS THE GEM..."

AND TO THINK
THAT **CEREBUS**
CAME SOUTH
TO SEEK
SANITY...!

THE BEAST
IS ENORMOUS--
BUT FROM
WHERE DID
IT....



"MY FOE SEEMS
MORE CEREBRAL
THAN THE
AVERAGE
BARBARIAN,"
MUSES DEATH.

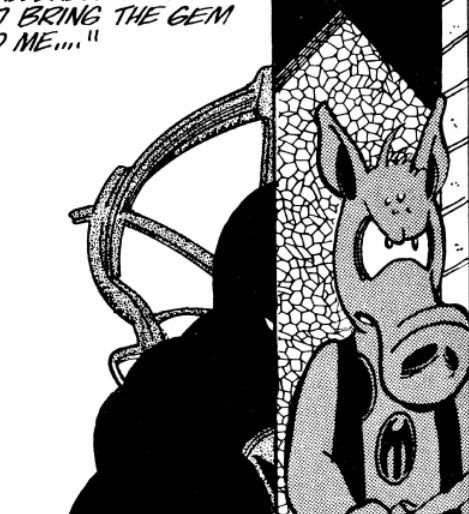
THE BARBARIAN SIDE OF
THE EARTH-PIG REACTS
INSTANTLY, THE SWORD
BITING INTO **PULPY**
FLESH....

...EVEN AS HIS BRAIN
REGISTERS THE NOTION
FOR WHAT IT IS -- THE
BEAST'S DEATH THROES
..."

KNOWLEDGEABLE
IN SORCERERS'
WAYS, HE IS
MOVED TO
WONDERMENT
AT THE POWER
OF THE BEAST'S
MASTER...

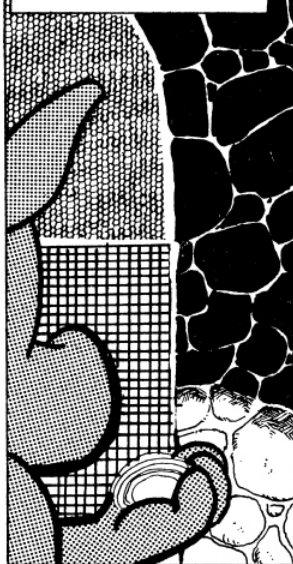
"THE BARBARIAN IS
TOO HEADSTRONG
-- TOO **INTELLIGENT**
TO CONTROL! THE
GEM MUST BE BROUGHT
WILLINGLY TO ME --
I NEED A MORE
MALLEABLE PERSONALITY
TO BRING THE GEM
TO ME...."

THE EARTH-
PIG HEAVES
A SIGH AND
TURNING BACK
ONTO THE
MAIN
AVENUE...



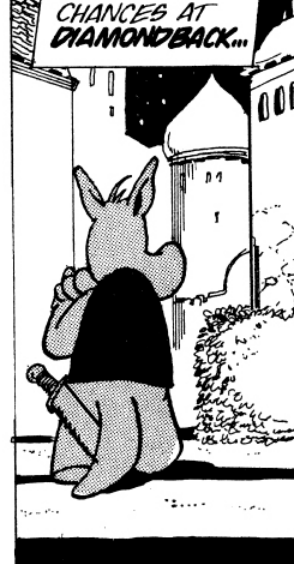
HE REMOVES THE
GLOWING GEM FROM
AN INNER POCKET...

... AND STUDIES IT
BRIEFLY BEFORE...

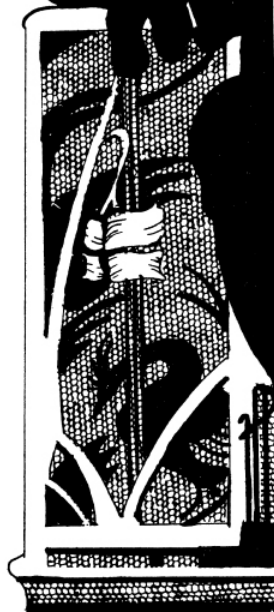


...HOOKING IT
ONTO HIS
NECK CHAIN...

HE CONSIDERS,
AGAIN, HIS
CHANCES AT
DIAMONDBACK...



"SOMEONE NEAR-
BY--A PERSONALITY
CAPABLE OF
WRESTING THE
GEM FROM THE
BARBARIAN..."



"A PERSONALITY
WITH NO SUBTLETY
-- AN **EASY**
VICTIM OF....."



A SATISFIED
CHUCKLE ISSUES
FROM DEEP IN
DEATH'S THROAT..



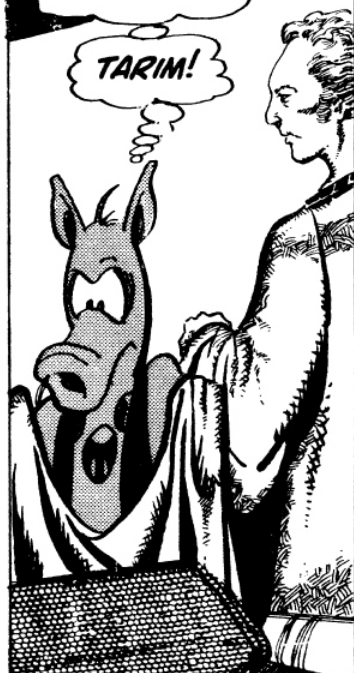
CEREBUS REFLECTS THAT THERE ARE DRAWBACKS TO POSING AS A MERCHANT -- ONE HAS TO ASSOCIATE WITH HIS KIND UNDER THE **CITY GUARD'S** WATCHFUL GAZE!

THE MERCHANTS AND TRADERS IN SERREA ARE CONSERVATIVE GAMBLERS AND FAVOUR SHIPPING WINE TO GULPING ALE...



NEARLY DAWN! NO MERCHANT WILL BE THINKING OF ALE OR **DIAMONDBACK** 'TIL SUNSET...

TARIM!



MAYHAP I SHOULD RISK CONSORTING WITH SOME OF THE **DEHRSION** MERCENARIES...

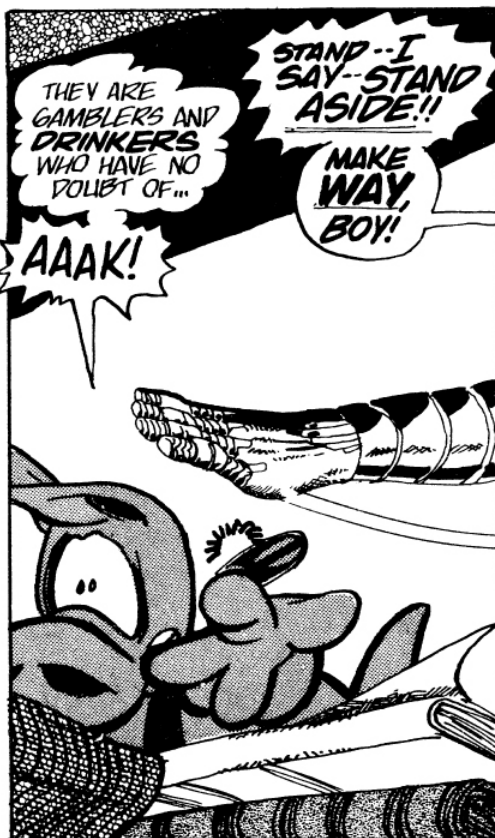


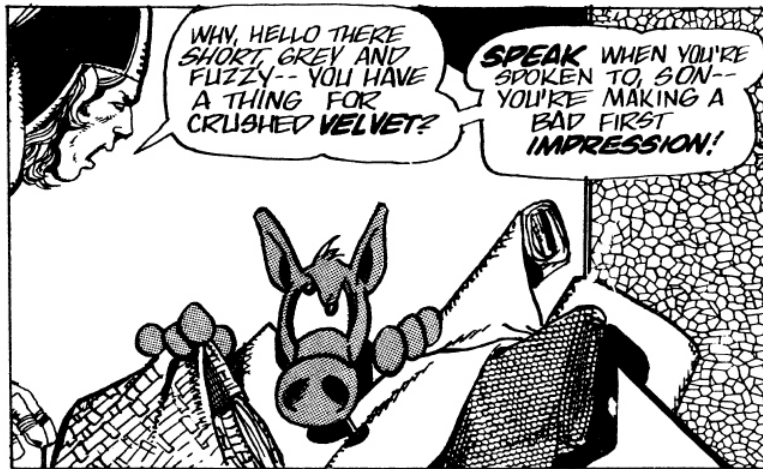
THEY ARE GAMBLERS AND DRINKERS WHO HAVE NO DOUBT OF...

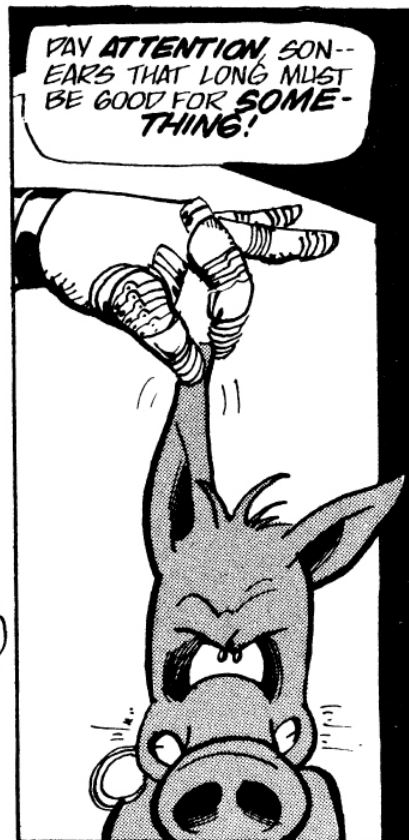
AAAK!

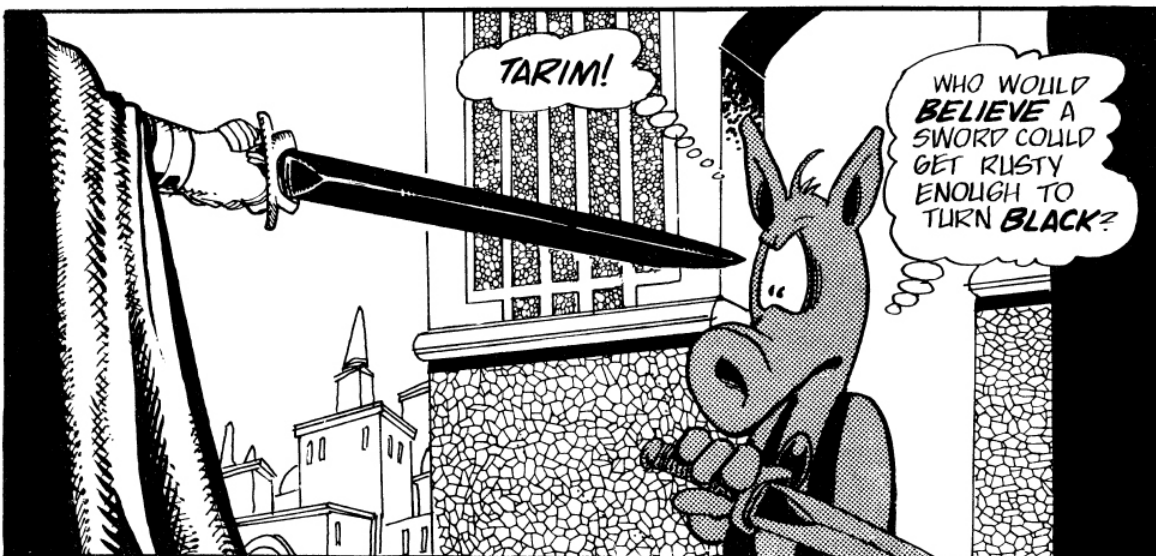
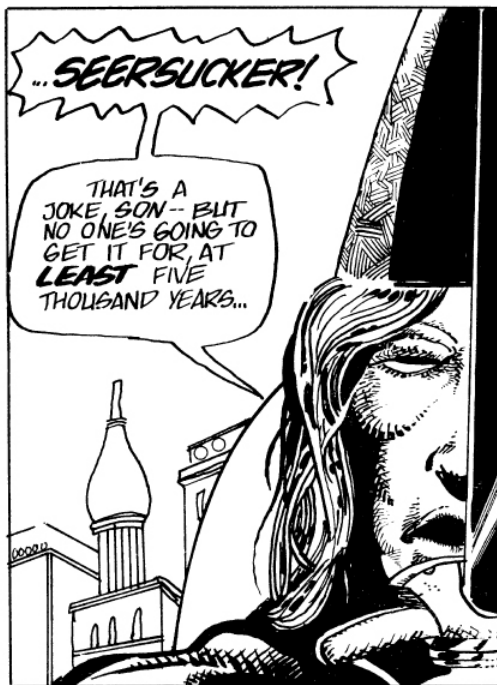
STAND -- I SAY -- STAND ASIDE!!

MAKE WAY, BOY!







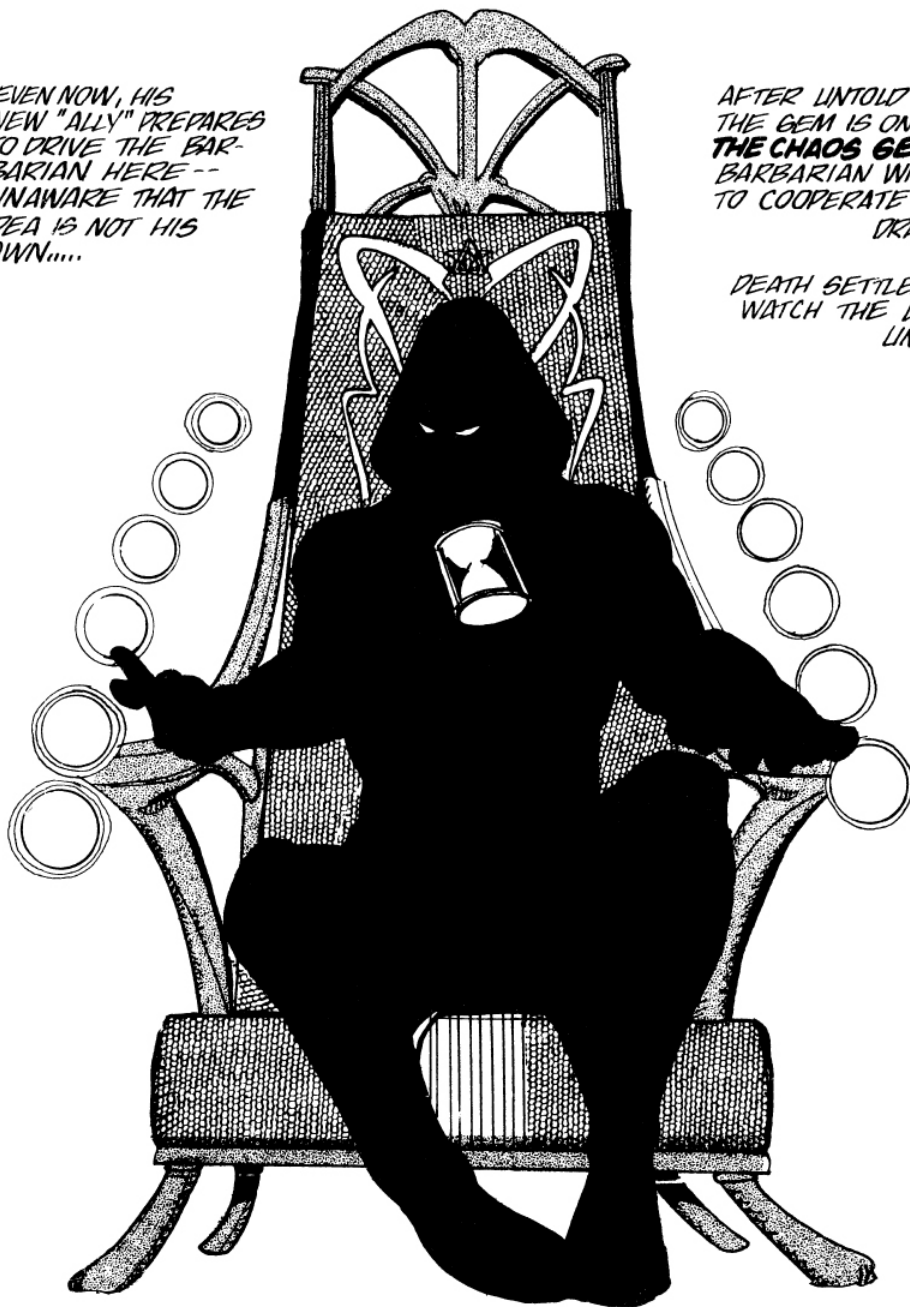


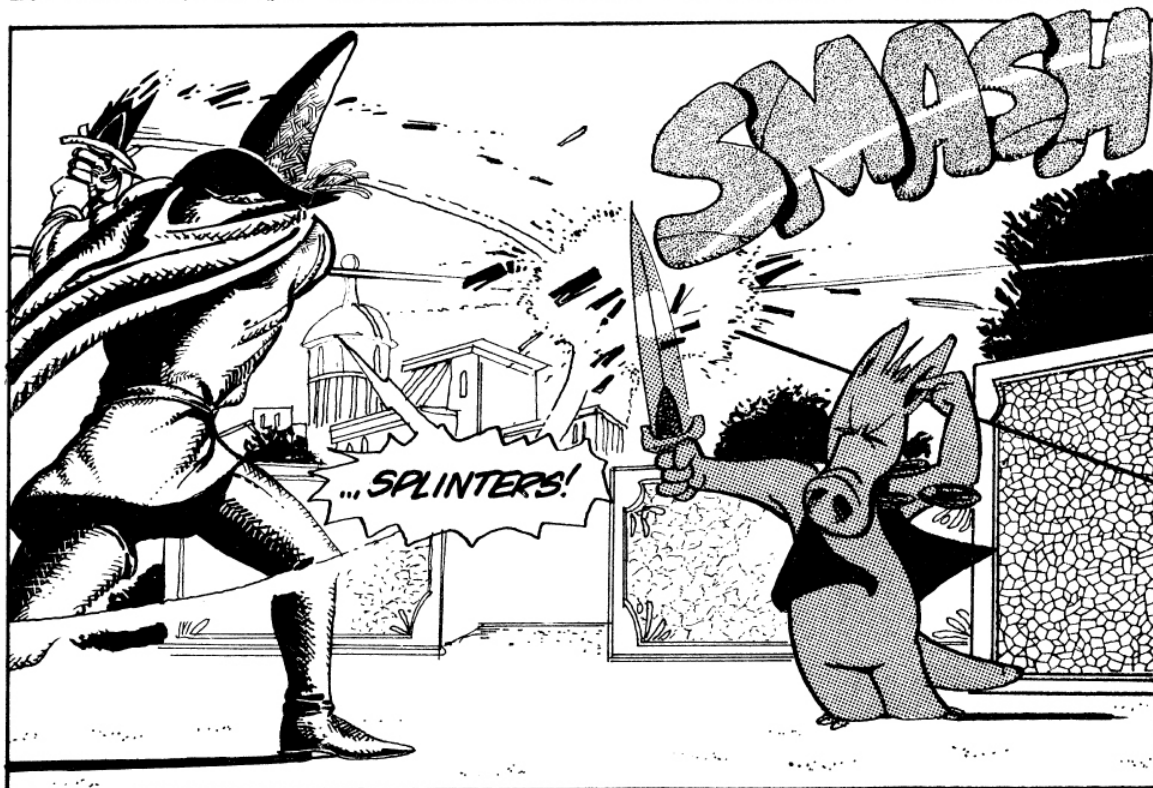
DEATH ABSENTLY CARESSES ONE OF THE HOVERING GEMS. "AN EVEN DOZEN," HE MUSES, "A SOURCE OF GREAT POWER, YES! **BUT**, CONSIDER THE THIRTEENTH GEM-- NOW SO CLOSE AT HAND." WITH THAT GEM WOULD COME A NEW GOLDEN AGE FOR **DEATH** DISEASES, FAMINE--WHOLE POPULATIONS WIPE OUT IN MERE DAYS! THE THOUGHT, AS ALWAYS, REINFORCES HIS GRIM DETERMINATION!

EVEN NOW, HIS NEW "ALLY" PREPARES TO DRIVE THE BAR-BARIAN HERE-- UN-AWARE THAT THE IDEA IS NOT HIS OWN....

AFTER UNTOLD CENTURIES, THE GEM IS ON ITS WAY. **THE CHAOS GEM**, THE BARBARIAN WILL BE MADE TO COOPERATE ONCE HE DRAWS NEAR!

DEATH SETTLES BACK TO WATCH THE DRAMA UNFOLD!











WATCH THIS, SON!
WITH BUT A SINGLE
BLOW, **ELROD**
DEFEATS THE
≡LIMPH≡



WITH ONLY TWO
≡LIMPH≡ OR ≡LIMPH≡
THREE PUNCHES
ELROD DEF....



WITH BARELY
≡LIMPH≡ ≡LIMPH≡
A HALF
DOZEN
PUNCHES,
ELR...



OH HELL!
WHERE'S
A BIG
ROCK
I CAN
HIT HIM
WITH?



HEY
CEREBUS!
-- YOU
GOT ANY
BIG ROCKS
OVER...



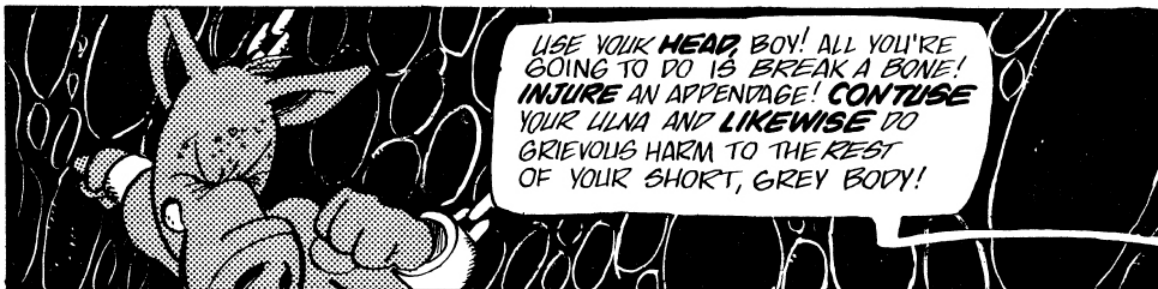
...THERE?



NOT MUCH
OF A
SCRAPPER,
ARE YOU,
BOY?

WE'LL LET
THEM ROT
IN THE
SOUTHGATE
PRISON....





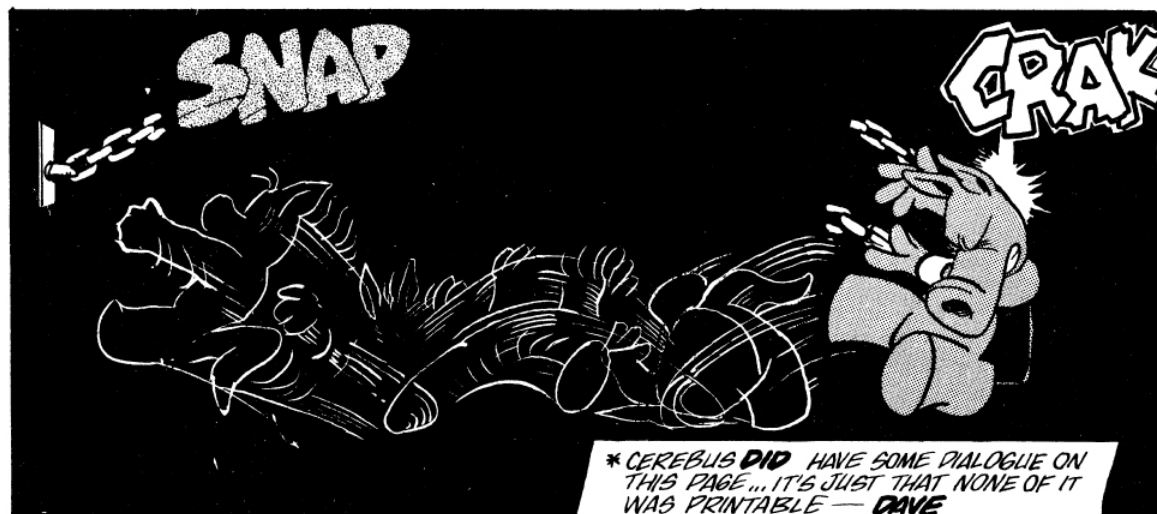
USE YOUR **HEAD**, BOY! ALL YOU'RE GOING TO DO IS **BREAK A BONE!** **INJURE AN APPENDAGE!** **CONTUSE YOUR LLNA** AND **LIKEWISE DO GRIEVOUS HARM TO THE REST OF YOUR SHORT, GREY BODY!**



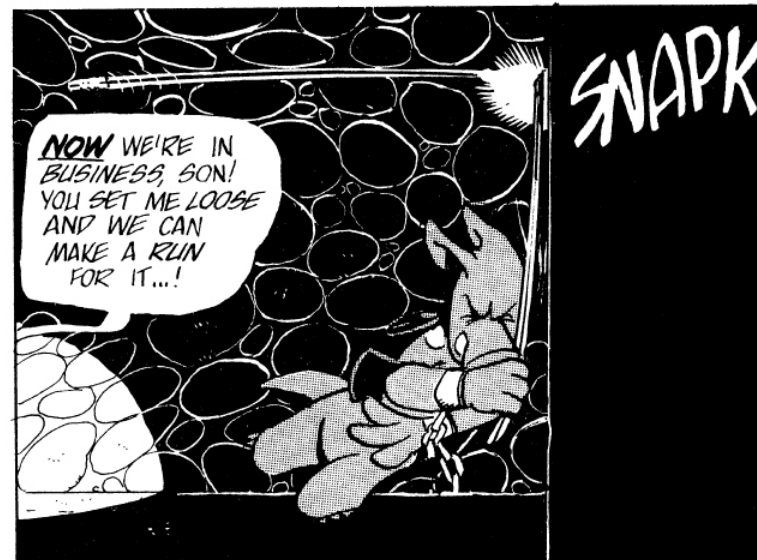
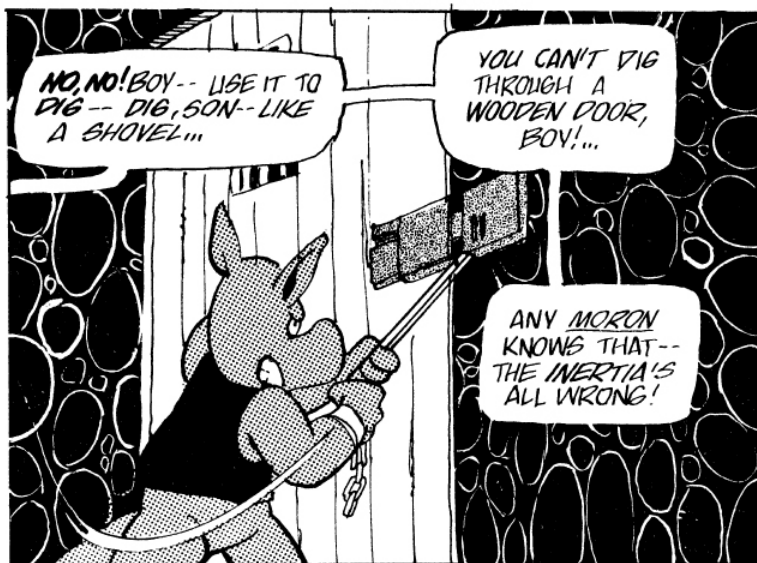
THAT'S JUST **TERRIFIC** SON-- NOW, YOU CAN PICK YOUR NOSE IF YOU WANT TO...

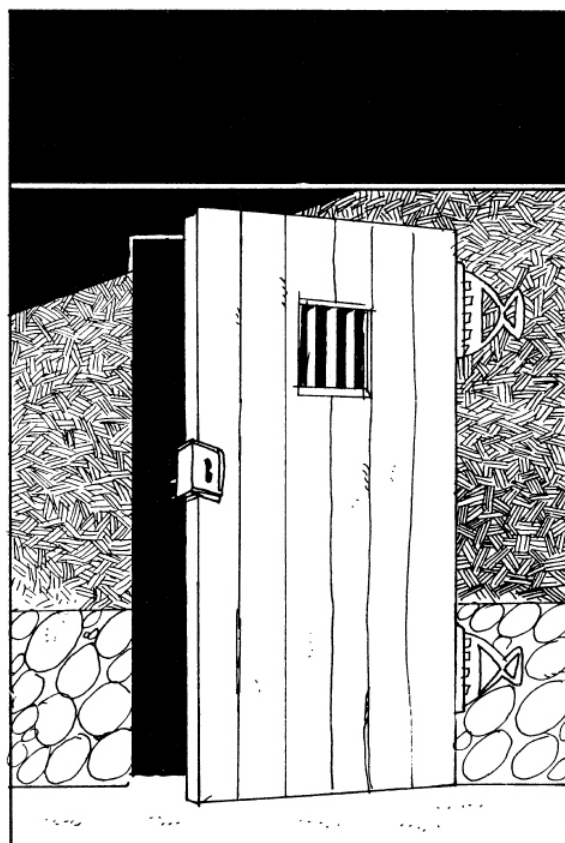
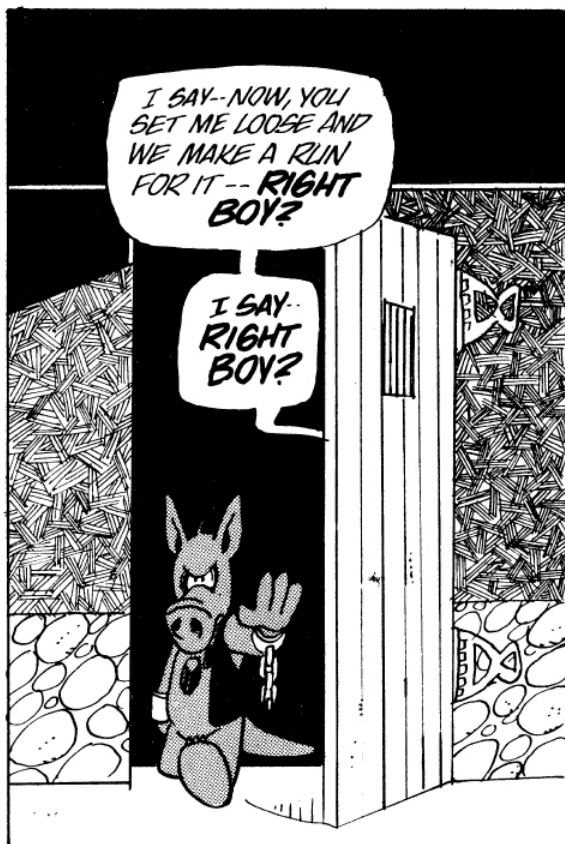


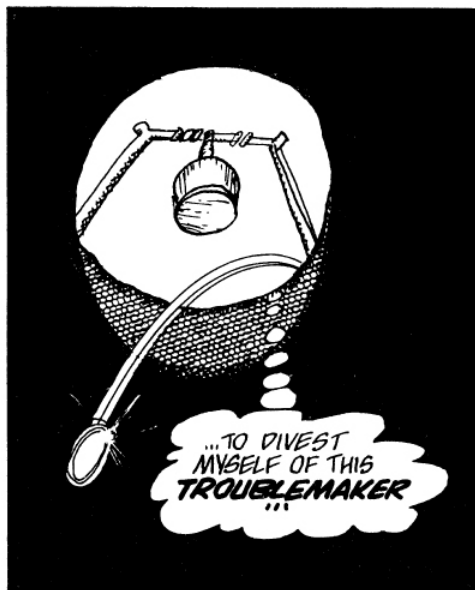
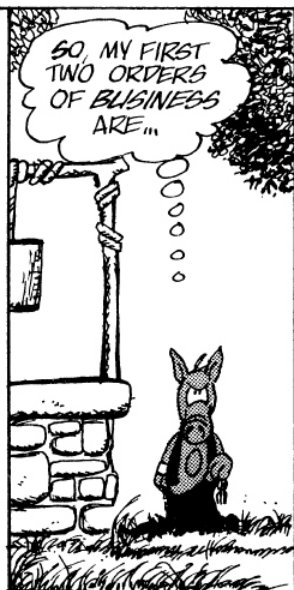
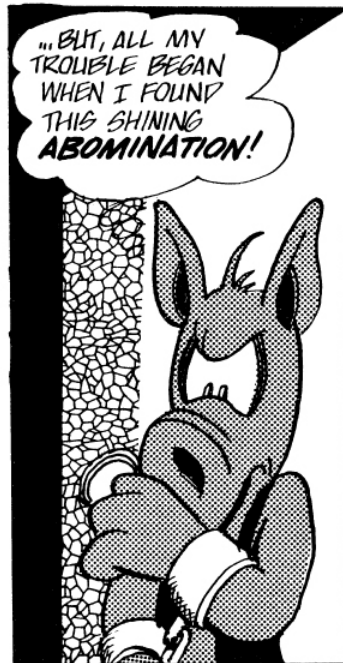
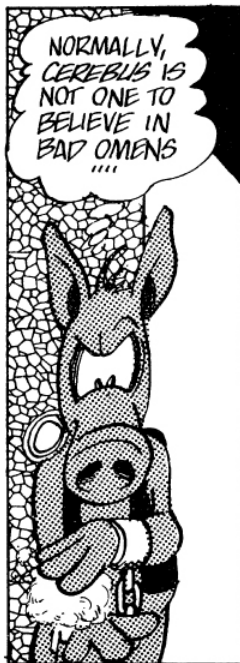
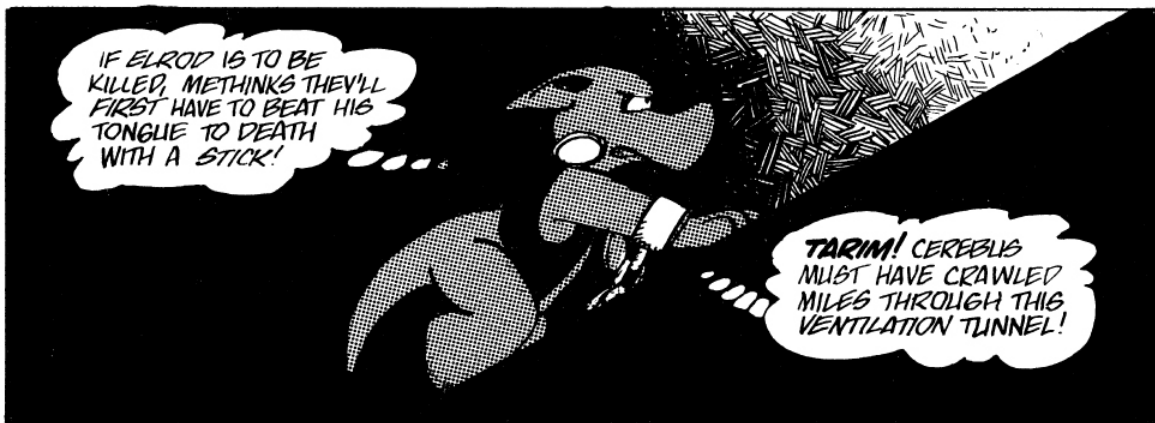
OH, COME ON NOW, BOY! JUST BECAUSE YOU FOUND A WEAK LINK IN ONE **CHAIN**, DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN **POSSIBLY...**

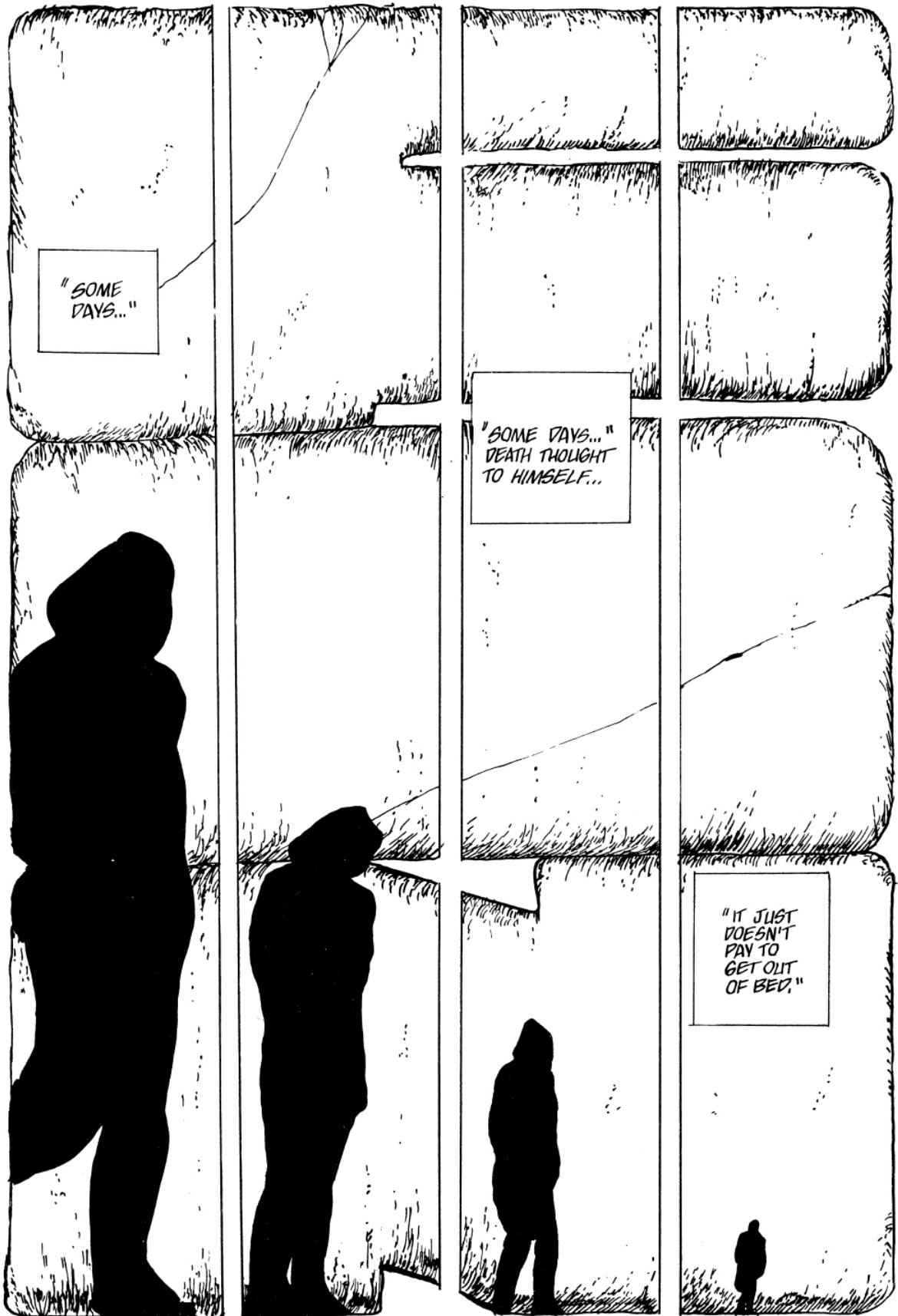


* CEREBUS **DID** HAVE SOME DIALOGUE ON THIS PAGE... IT'S JUST THAT NONE OF IT WAS PRINTABLE — **DAVE**









CEREBUS the AARDVARK®



AFTER LEAVING SERREA, CEREBUS DRIFTS WEST INTO THE RED MARCHES WHERE HE ENTERS THE EMPLOY OF **TURAN GENN**, A MERCENARY CAPTAIN! THE SUMMER RAINS ARE AT THEIR PEAK AND THE EARTH-PIG EXECUTES HIS TASKS AMID MUCH GRUMBLING ABOUT SUB-TROPICAL RAINFALL...

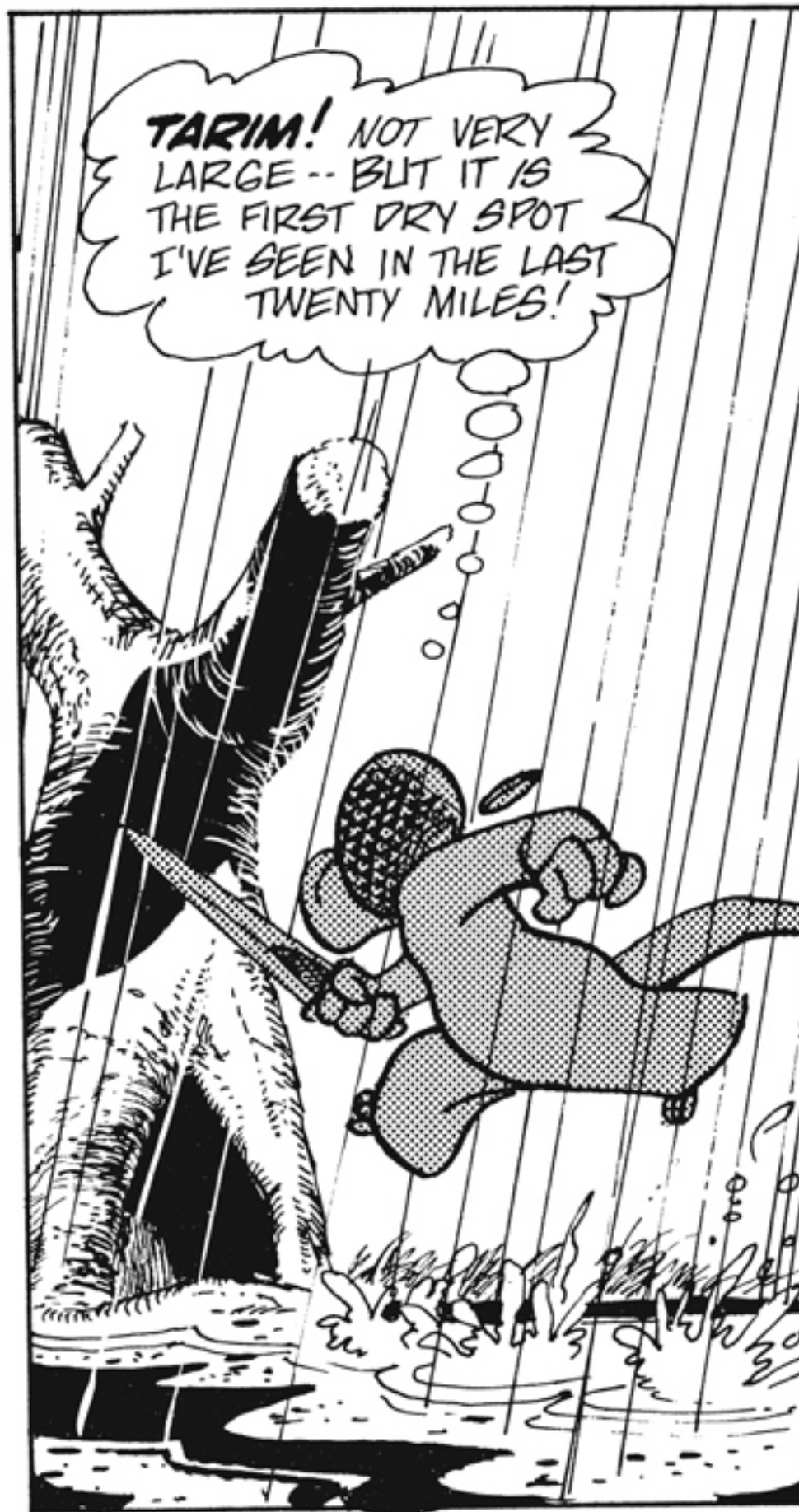


TARIM'S BLOOD!
THREE WEEKS OF
NON-STOP RAIN!
DAMN THESE
BORDER PATROLS!



I'D BETTER
FIND SHELTER
BEFORE TOO
LONG...

IT DOESN'T
LOOK LIKE
I'LL MAKE
IT TO THE
OUTPOST
TONIGHT...



TARIM! NOT VERY
LARGE -- BUT IT IS
THE FIRST DRY SPOT
I'VE SEEN IN THE LAST
TWENTY MILES!

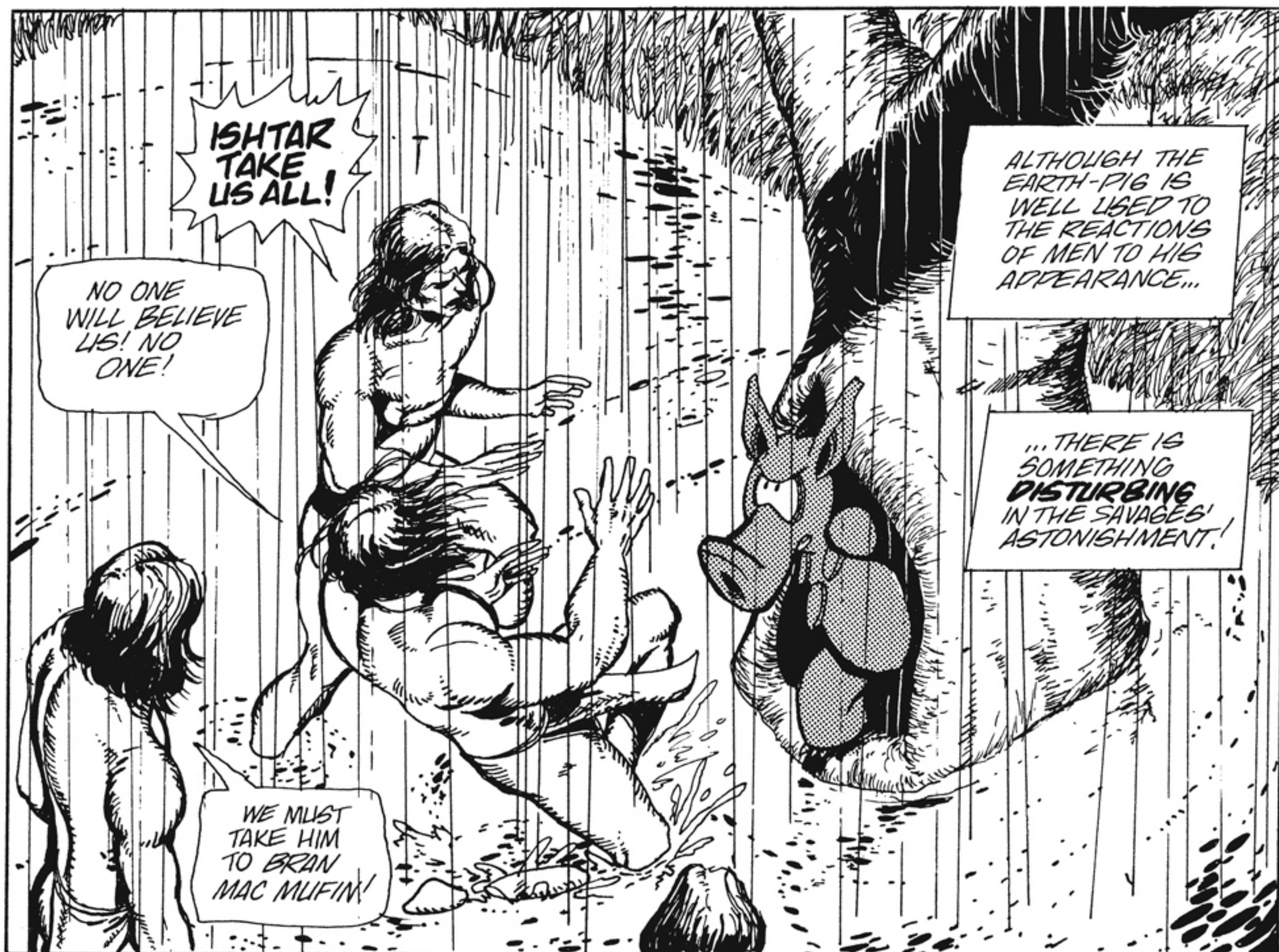


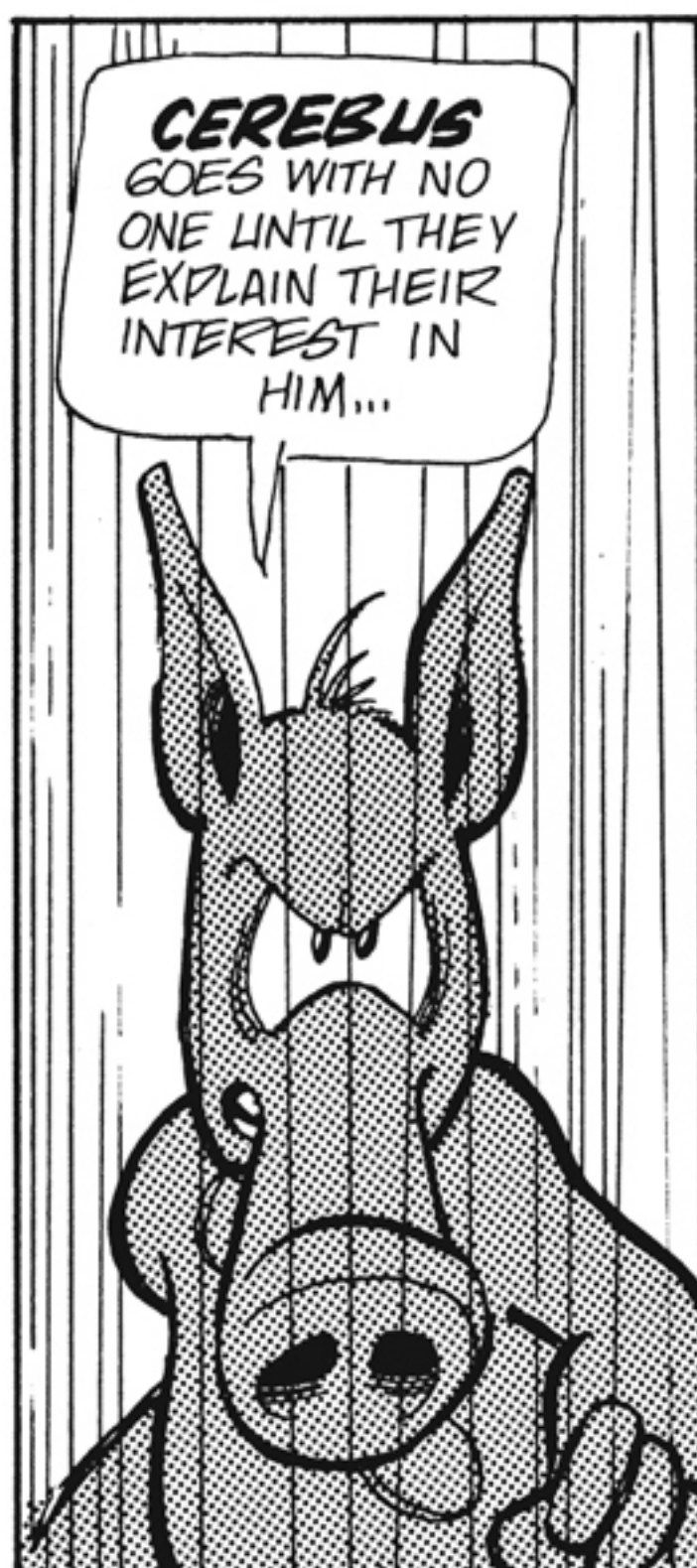
GRIMLY, CEREBUS
SQUEEZES INTO
THE TINY HOLLOW.
ALMOST INSTANTLY
THE ENCLOSURE
FILLS WITH THE
ODOR OF WET
AARDVARK FUR...

THE SMELL DOESN'T
SERVE TO BRIGHTEN
THE EARTH PIG'S
DISPOSITION...



SOME MANNER OF
CREATURE... QUIETLY
PARCHA QUA NON



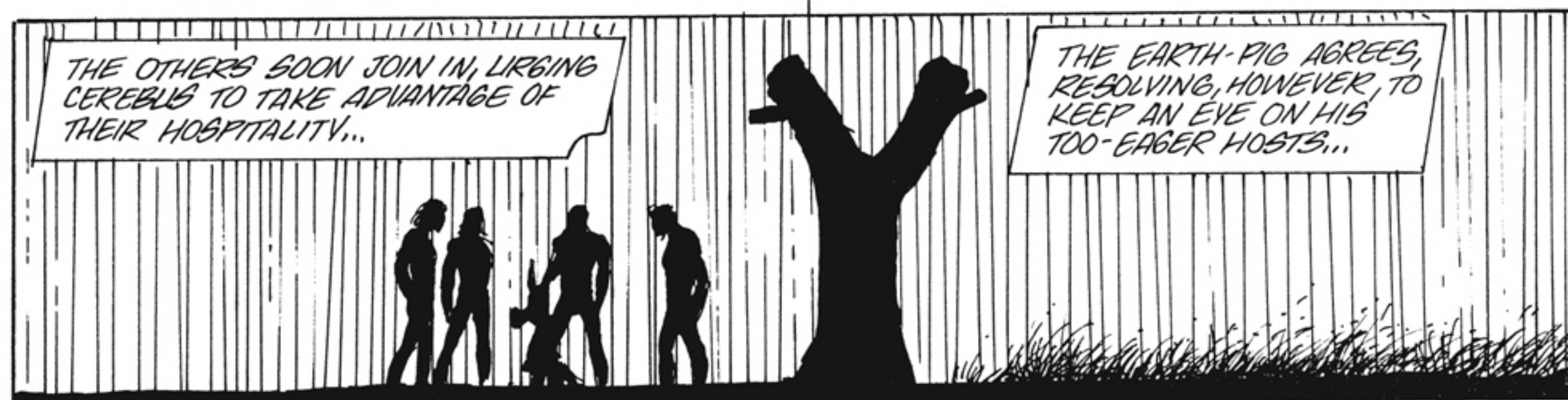


CEREBUS
GOES WITH NO
ONE UNTIL THEY
EXPLAIN THEIR
INTEREST IN
HIM...



YOU MUST
COME WITH
US ... YOU'RE
THE...

uh -- YOU'RE
OBVIOUSLY
IN NEED OF
A WARM
SHELTER...



THE OTHERS SOON JOIN IN, URGING
CEREBUS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF
THEIR HOSPITALITY...

THE EARTH-PIG AGREES,
RESOLVING, HOWEVER, TO
KEEP AN EYE ON HIS
TOO-EAGER HOSTS...



ESPECIALLY
THOSE WHO
STAND BEHIND
HIM...



CEREBUS SAYS NOTHING, BUT CONTINUES TO ASSESS HIS COMPANIONS! WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE SIMPLE KNIFE, THEY ARE WEAPONLESS...

PERHAPS THEY ARE SIMPLE FARMERS OR NOMADS AS THEIR SPEECH SUGGESTS...

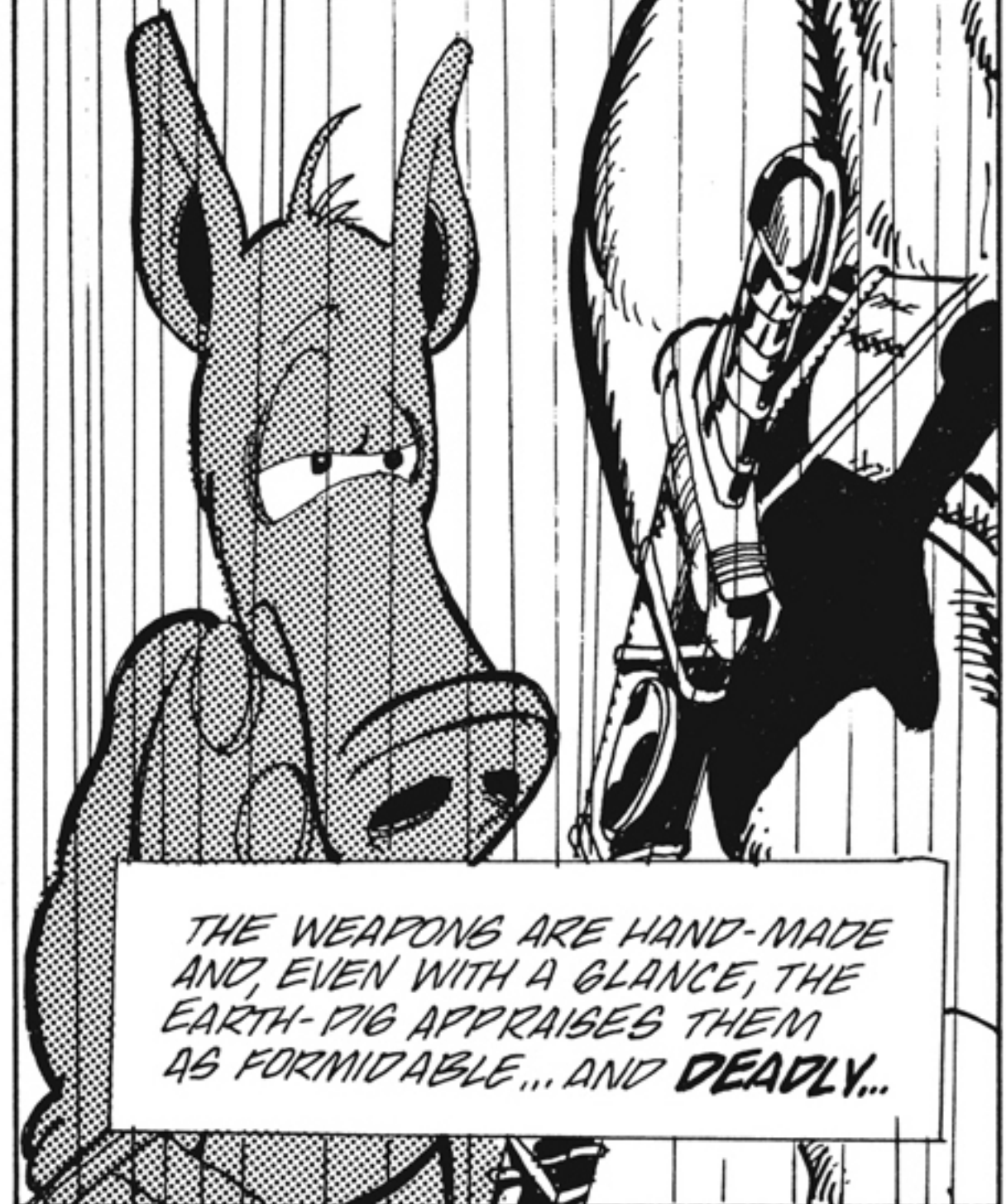
ABRUPTLY, THE LEADER CHANGES DIRECTION, HEADING FOR A PATCH OF TALLER GRASS



A PITY WE CAN'T ALWAYS TRAVEL WITHOUT OUR WEAPONS...

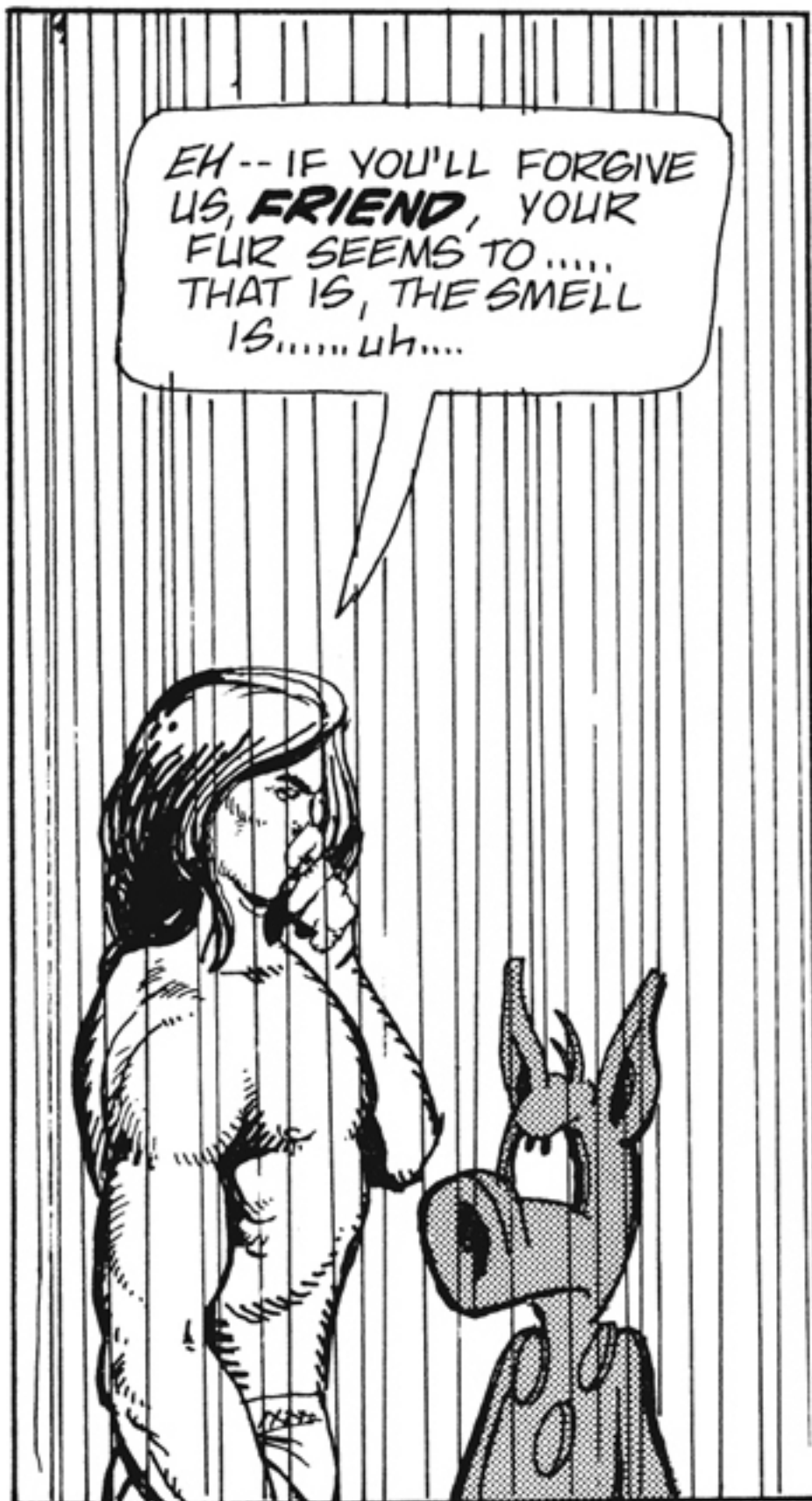
...BUT THE MARCHES GROW DANGEROUS AS NIGHT APPROACHES...

AND A GOOD SWORD CAN SPELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND **DEATH...**

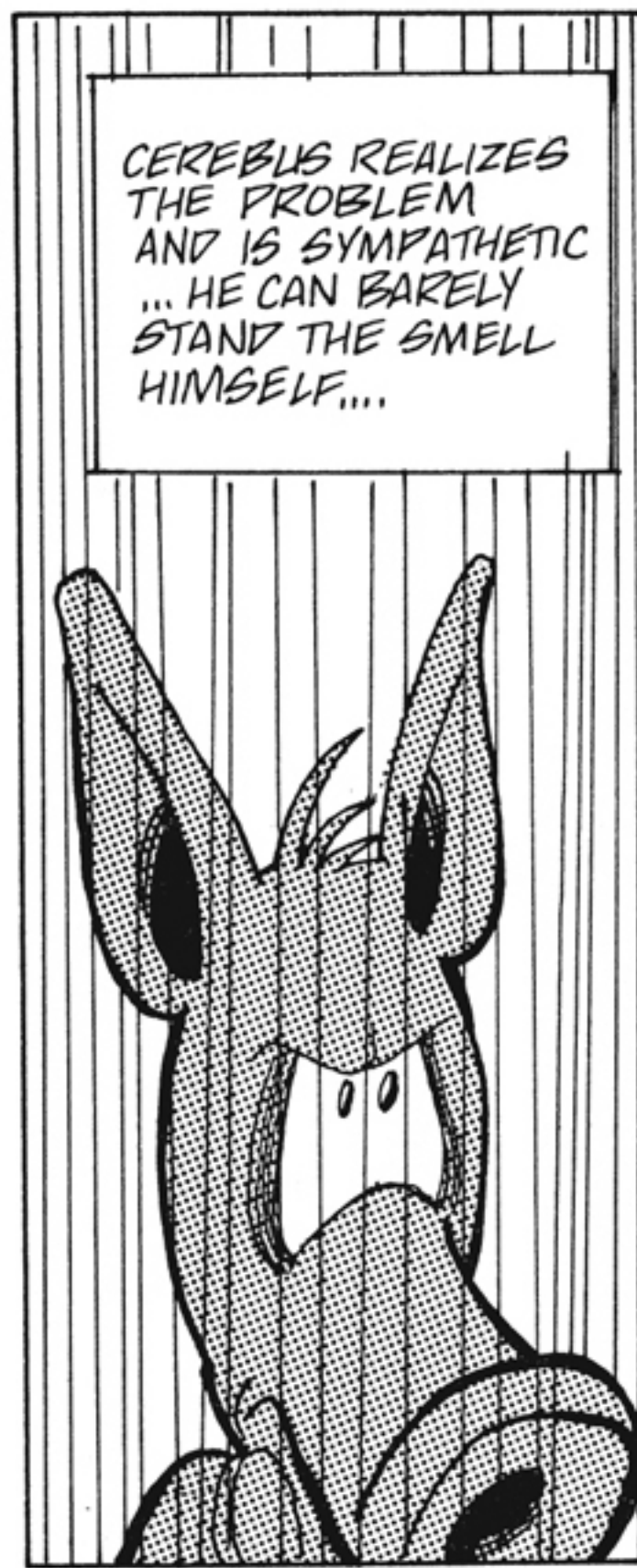


THE WEAPONS ARE HAND-MADE AND, EVEN WITH A GLANCE, THE EARTH-DIG APPRAISES THEM AS FORMIDABLE... AND **DEADLY...**

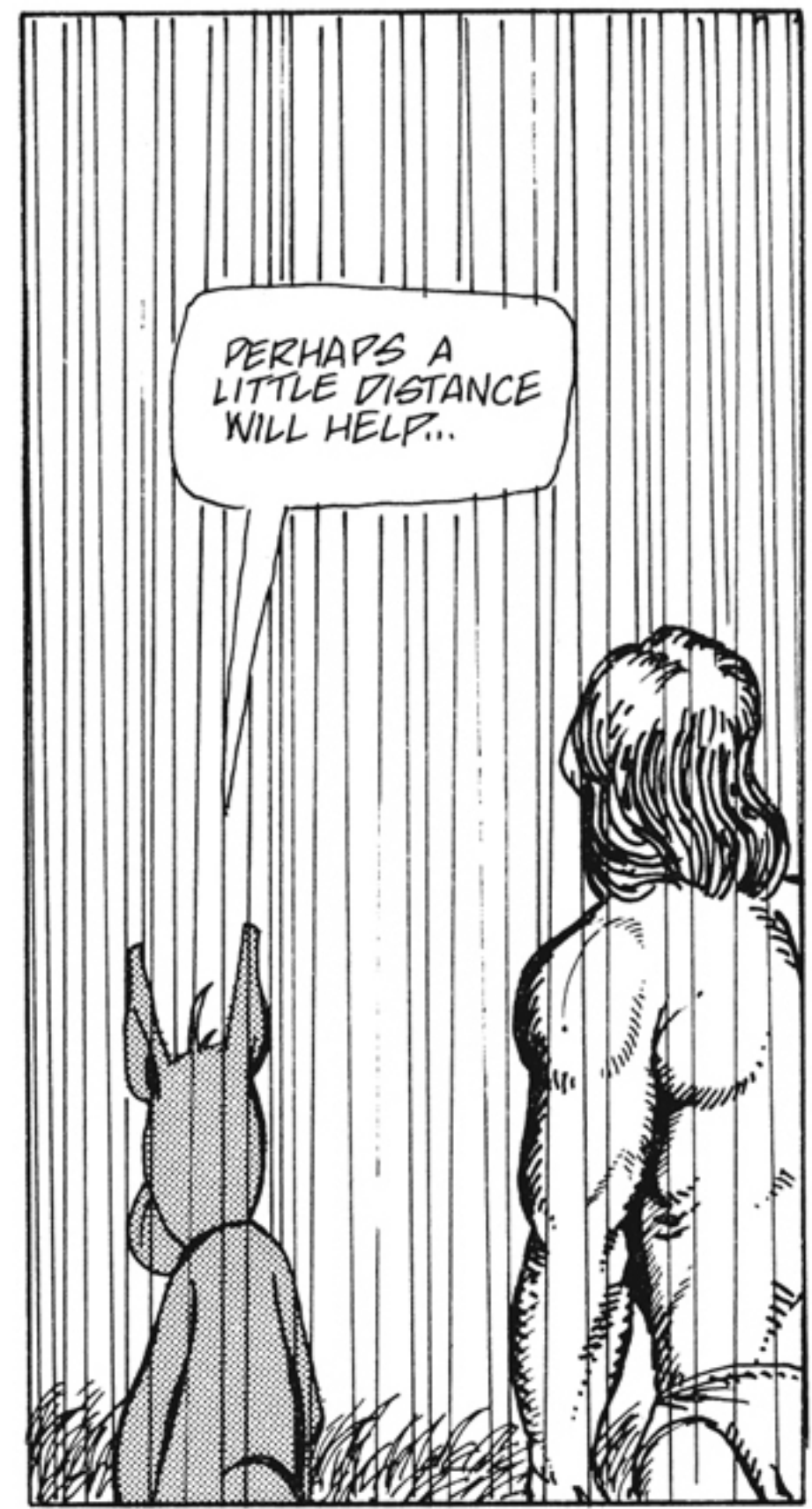




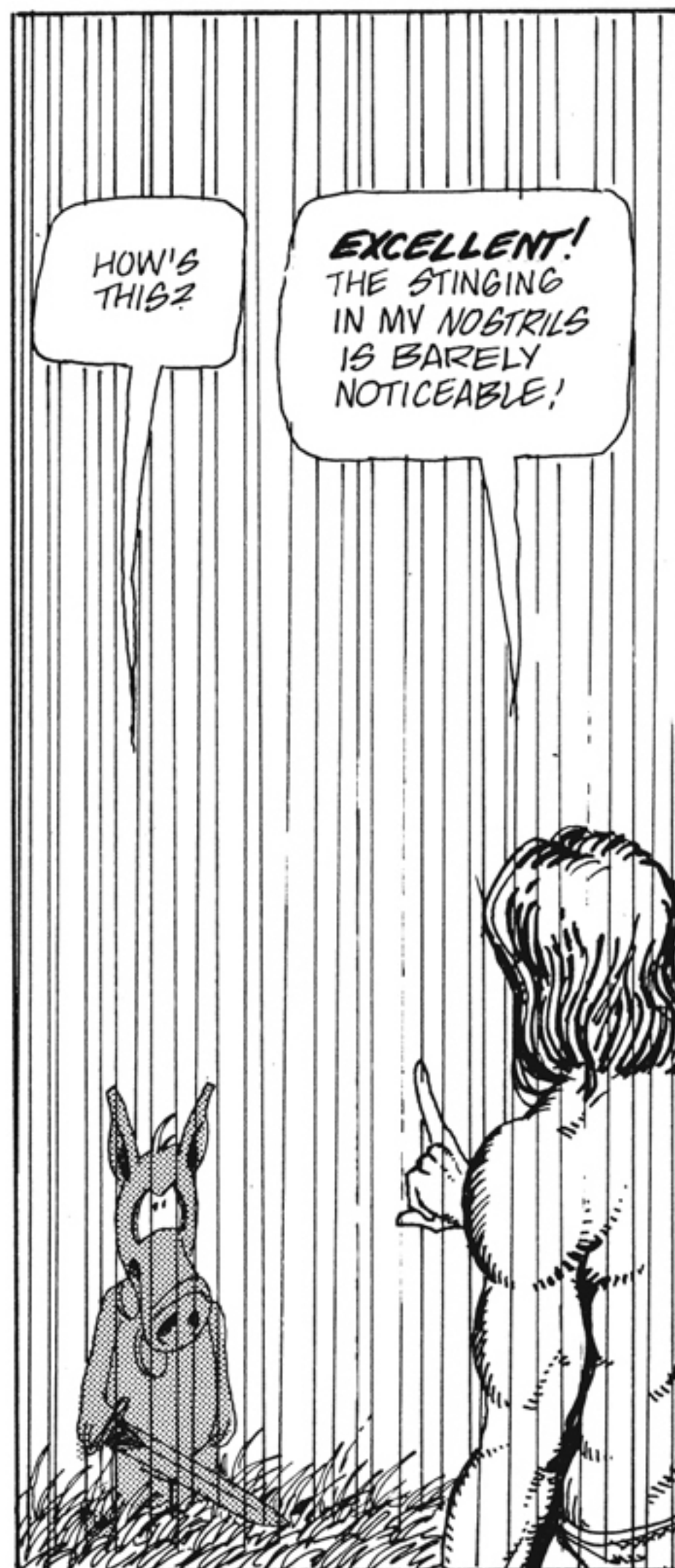
EH-- IF YOU'LL FORGIVE US, **FRIEND**, YOUR FUR SEEMS TO THAT IS, THE SMELL IS uh....



CEREBUS REALIZES THE PROBLEM AND IS SYMPATHETIC ... HE CAN BARELY STAND THE SMELL HIMSELF....

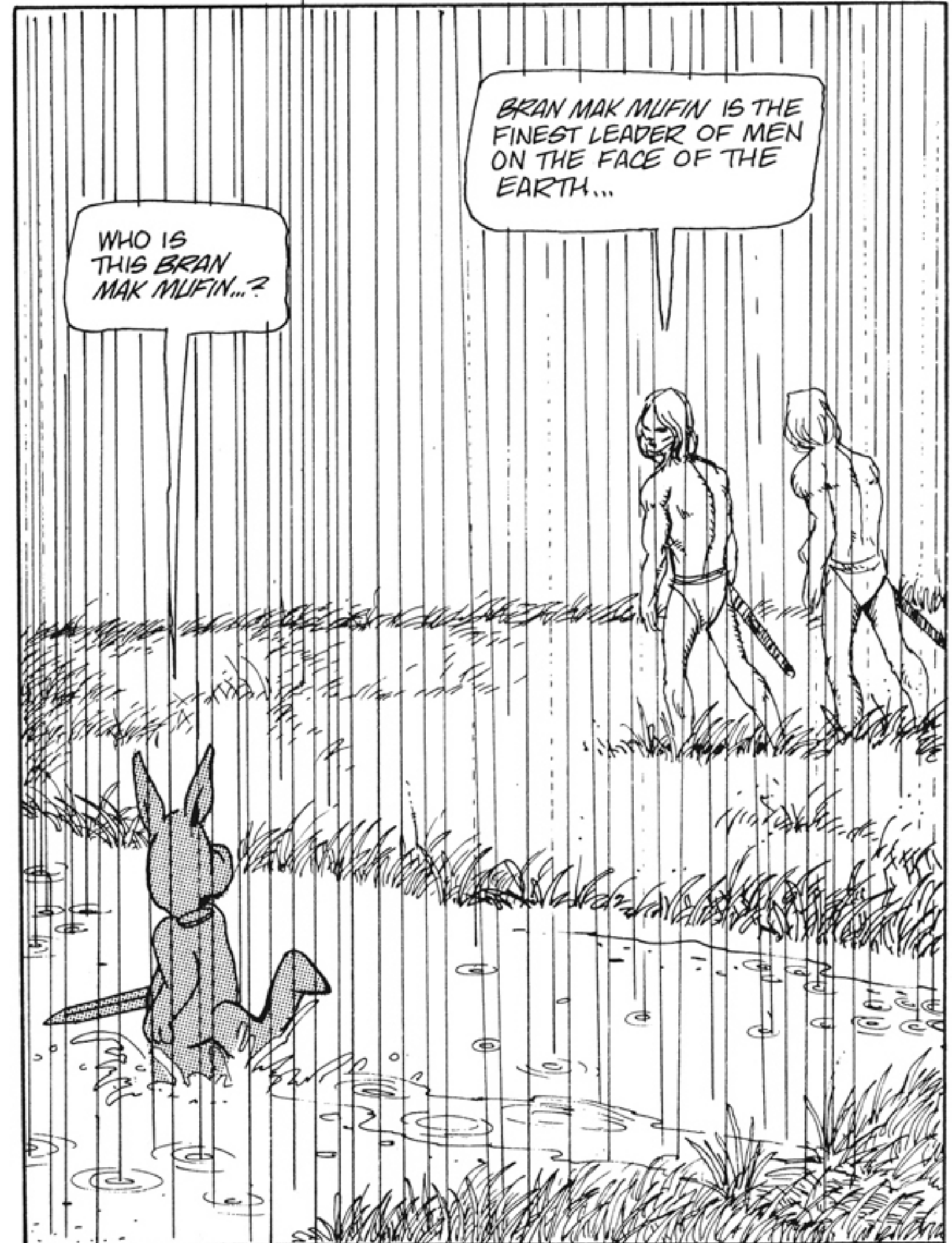


PERHAPS A LITTLE DISTANCE WILL HELP...



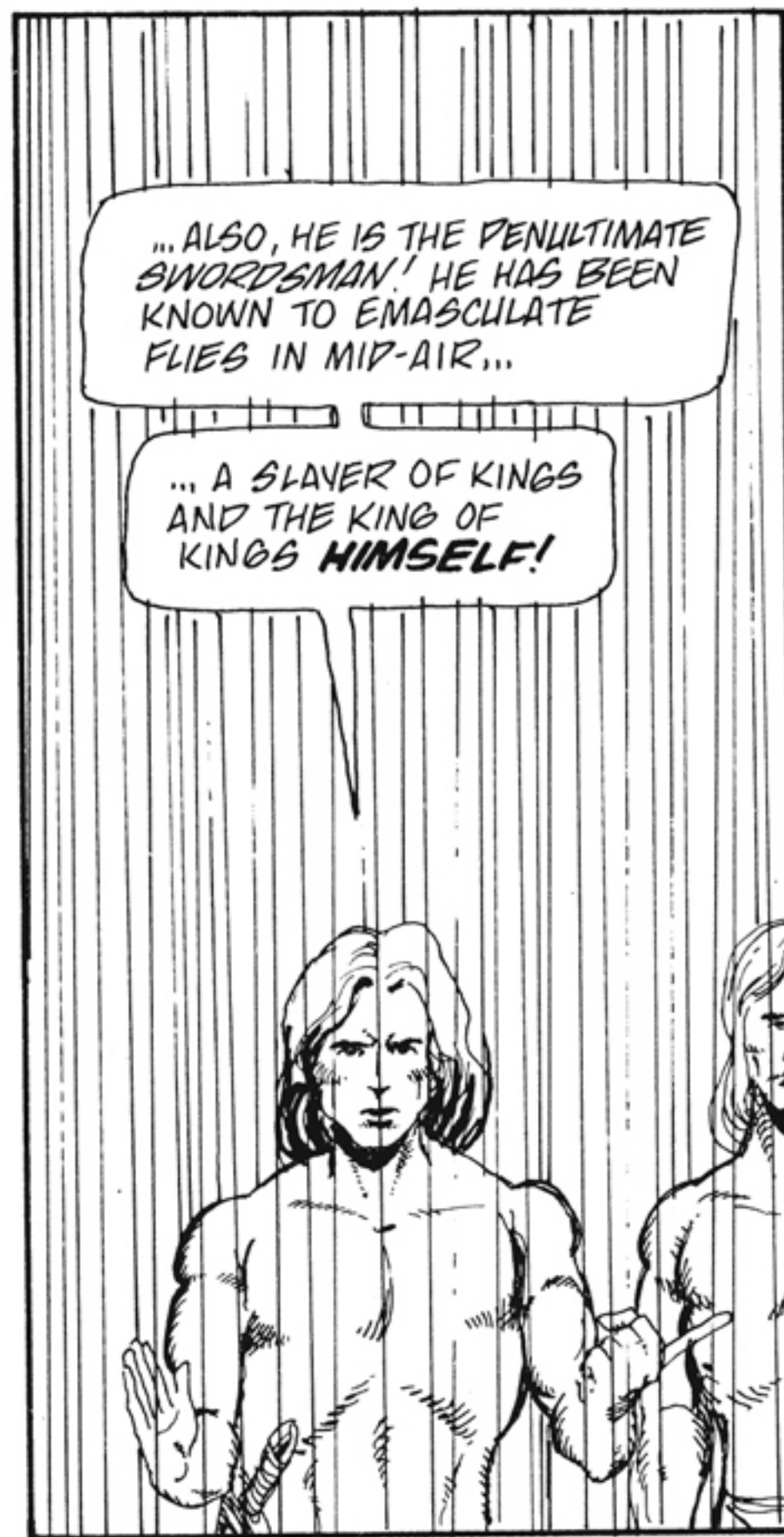
HOW'S THIS?

EXCELLENT! THE STINGING IN MY NOSTRILS IS BARELY NOTICEABLE!



WHO IS THIS **BRAN MAK MUFIN**...?

BRAN MAK MUFIN IS THE FINEST LEADER OF MEN ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH....



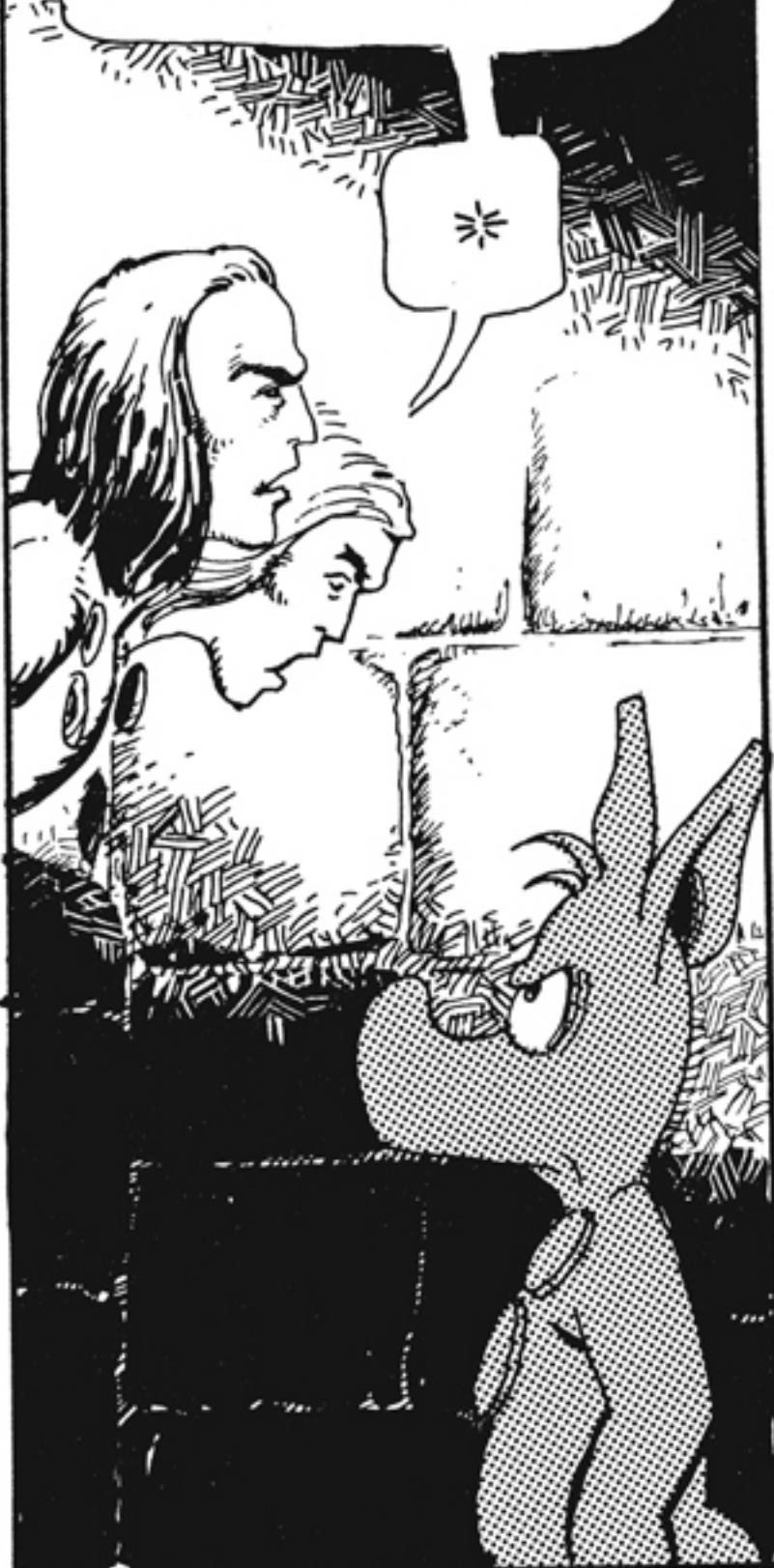




BUT-- MOST REVERED
LEADER-- I HAVE
BROUGHT YOU A.....
GUEST...!



GUEST!? FIRST YOU
INTERRUPT MY REVERIE
AND NOW YOU TELL
ME! YOU'VE BROUGHT
A... BROUGHT... A



ASHTOTH'S VISAGE!
THAT BRAN MAK MUFIN
SHOULD HAVE LIVED TO
SEE.... AFTER ALL THESE
YEARS...



WHERE DID
YOU FIND
HIM...?

WHERE?



NEVER
MIND!...

JUST LEAVE
HIS **ALONE**
TO TALK....





YOU ARE NO DOUBT **CURIOUS** ABOUT THIS SET-UP,...

A DRINK FIRST, AND THEN I'LL ANSWER ALL YOUR QUESTIONS!



FERMENTED GOAT'S BLOOD! IT TAKES A WHILE TO GET USED TO THE AFTER-TASTE,...



CEREBUS WOULD SOONER GET USED TO RAT POISON!...

THOUGH YOU SPEAK A FLUENT CONNIVIN DIALECT, I DON'T RECOGNIZE YOUR...

WE ARE THE **PIGTS**...

...AN ANCIENT AND FEARED RACE

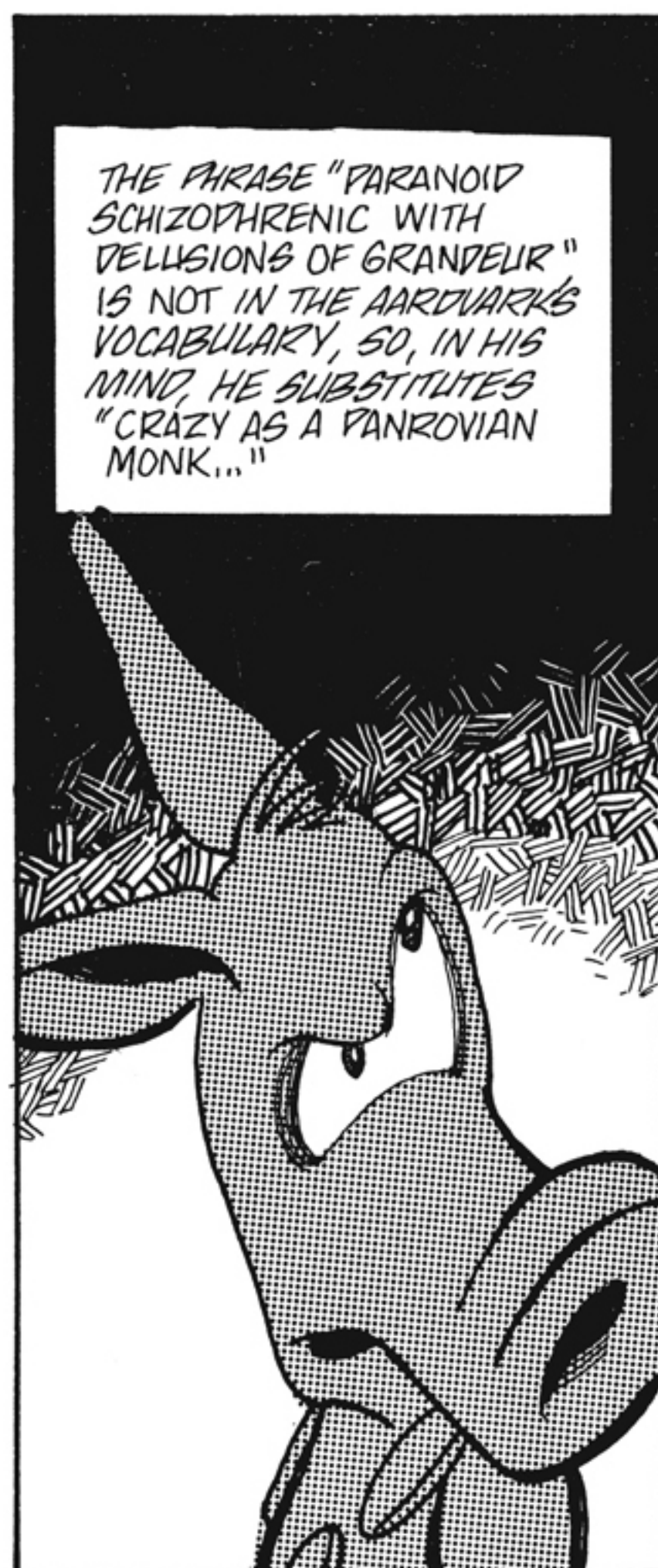
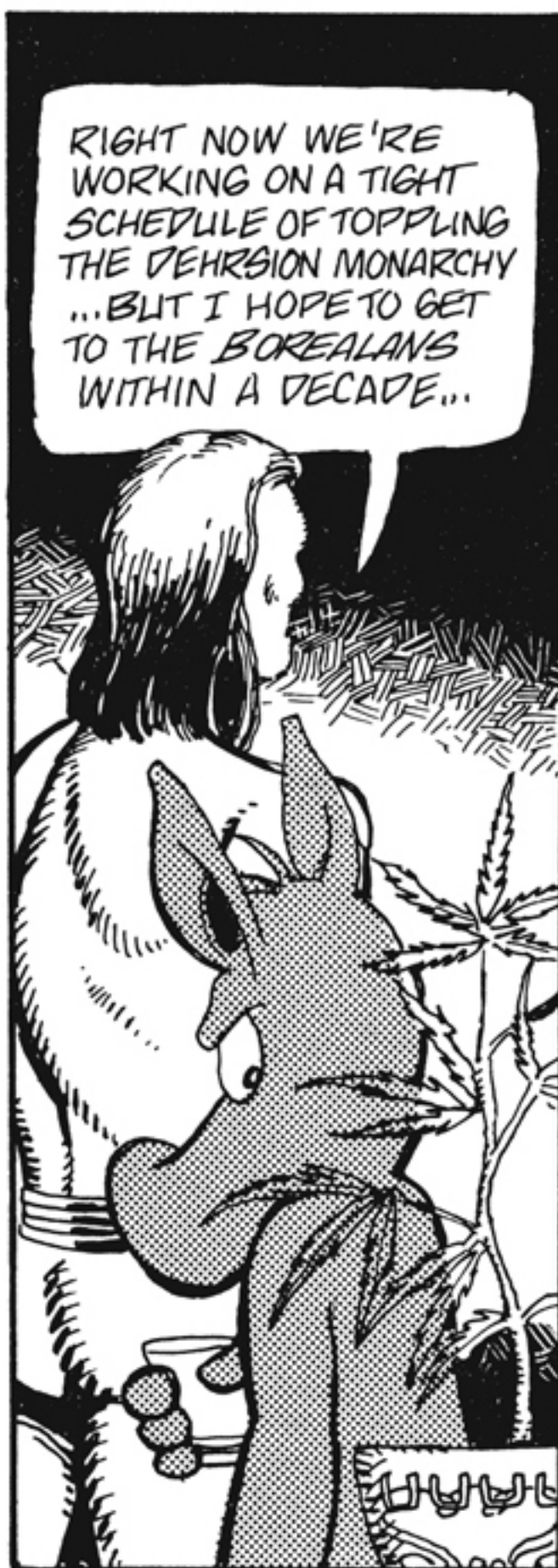


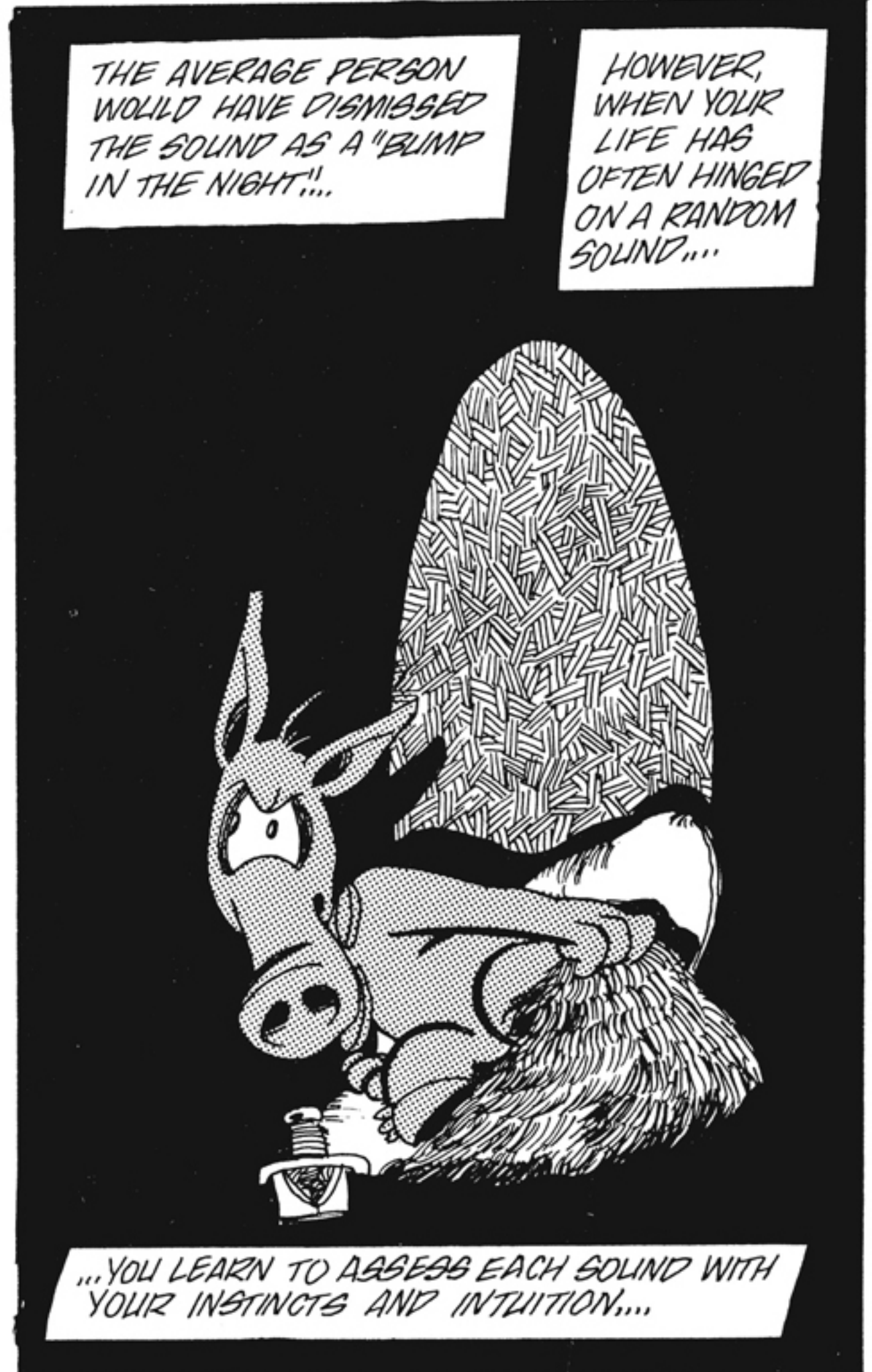
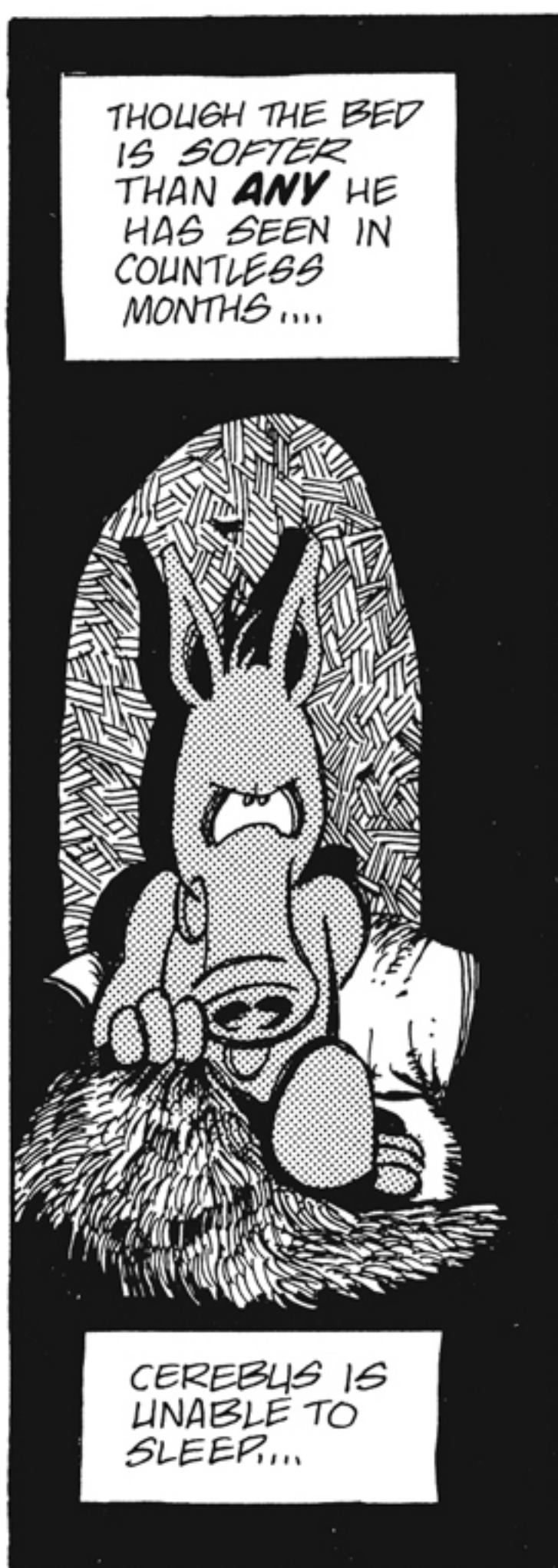
WE ARE AVENGERS OF THE MEEK, THE RECALCITRANT, THE SCARED, THE DUBIOUS AND THE OPPRESSED, WE EXIST ONLY TO **TOPPLE** THE EMPIRE,...

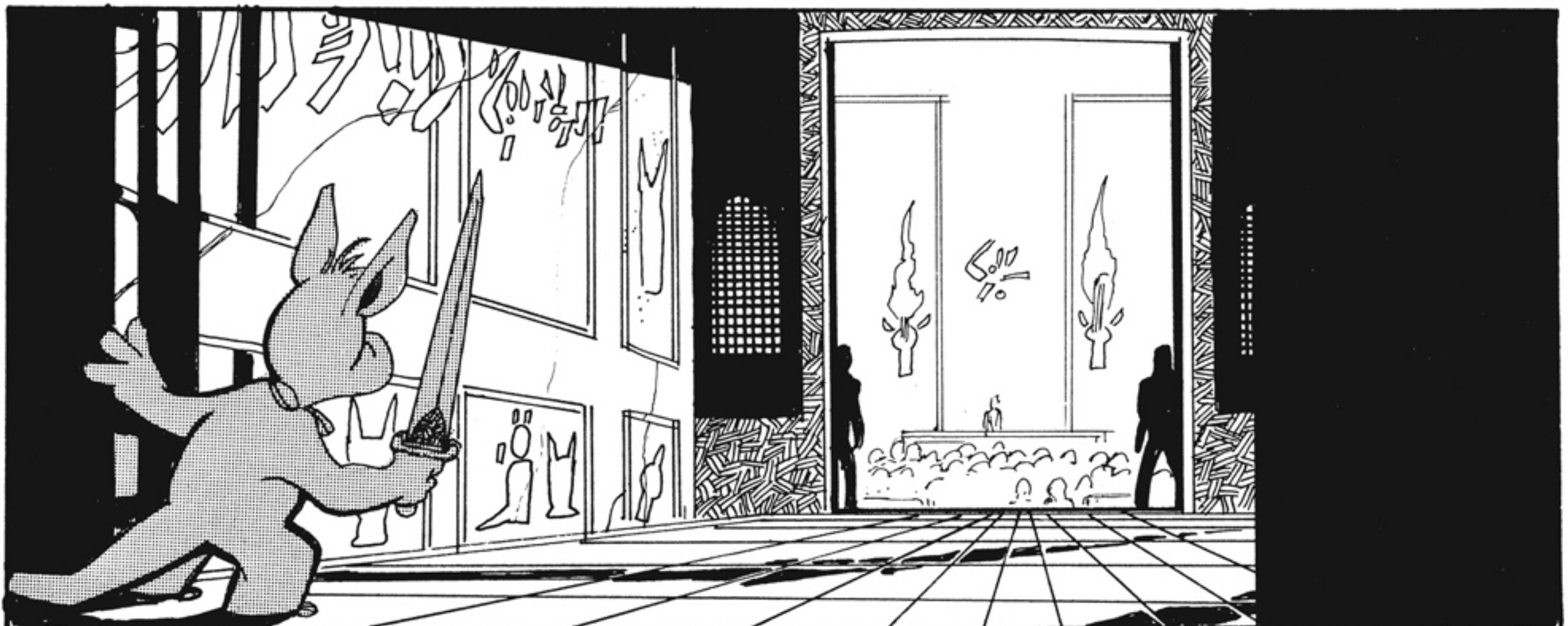
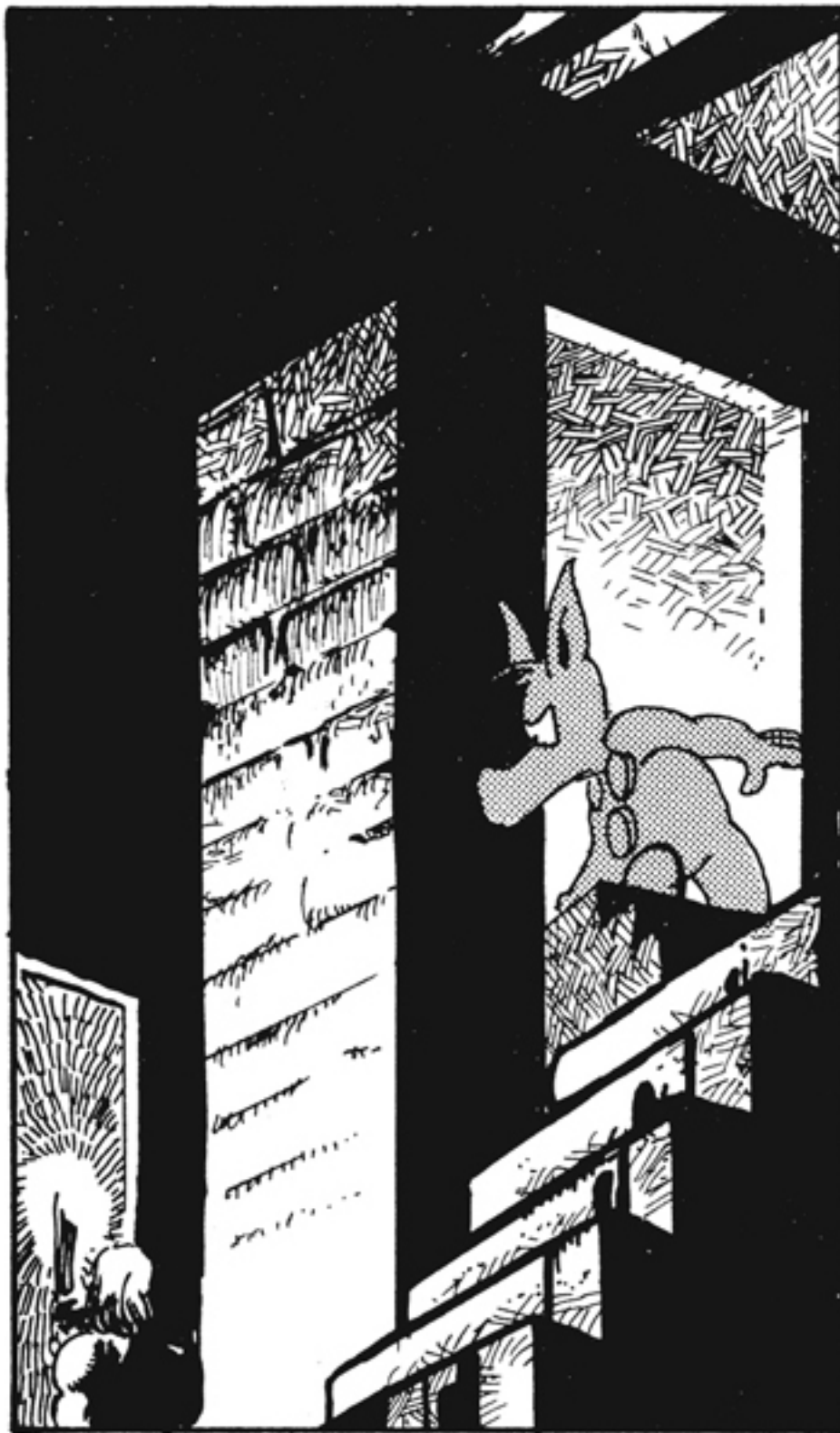
WHICH EMPIRE?

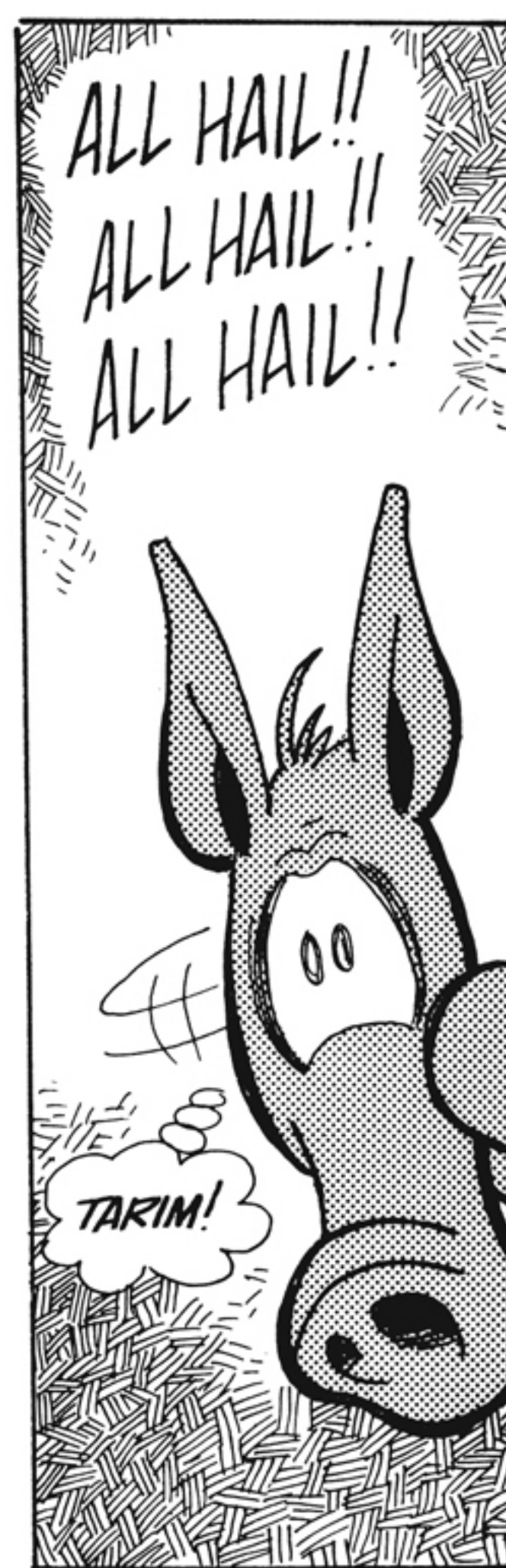
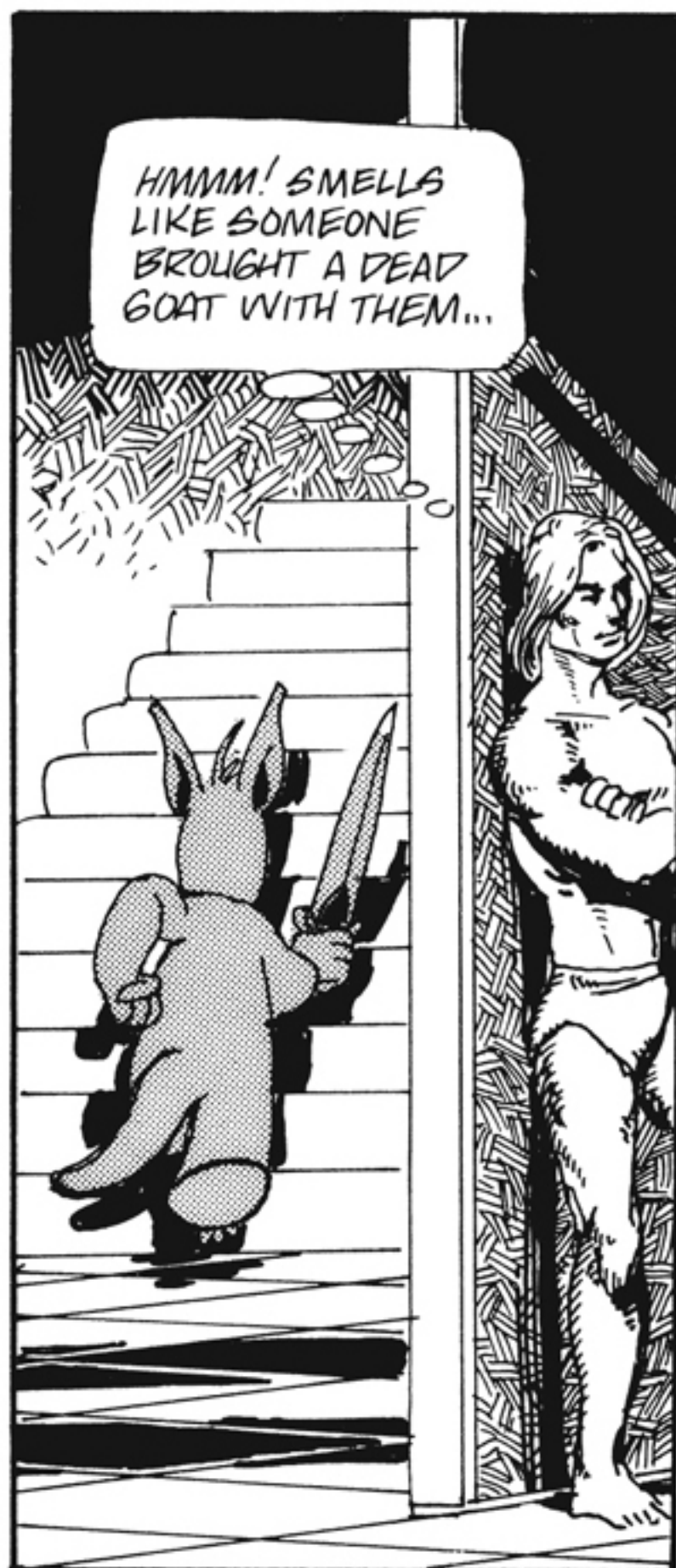


ANY EMPIRE-- YOU NAME IT AND WE'VE TOPPLED IT... THE REDEEMER DYNASTY, THE EASTERN MONOLITHS, THE BLACK TOWER EMPIRE,...









IT WAS PERHAPS FIFTEEN FEET TALL,
MADE OF SOME KIND OF SOFT GREY
STONE! BRAN MAK MUFIN'S INTEREST
IN HIM WAS NOW EASILY UNDERSTOOD--
THE RESEMBLANCE WAS **ASTOUNDING!**

SOME KIND OF PREDICTION
HAD BEEN FULFILLED BY
THE EARTH-PIG'S ARRIVAL
IN THE RED MARCHES,
CEREBUS REALIZED..

BRAN MAK MUFIN SAW
HIM AS THE REINCARNATION
OF SOME GOD-KING FROM
THE DISTANT PAST....



"AND THE DIGTS OF
MANY LANDS WILL
FOLLOW AND DEVASTATION
WILL BE THE LOT OF
THE UNBELIEVERS...."

"FOLLOW HIM,
O SONS OF THE
PIG, FOR
VENGEANCE
WILL BE YOURS!"

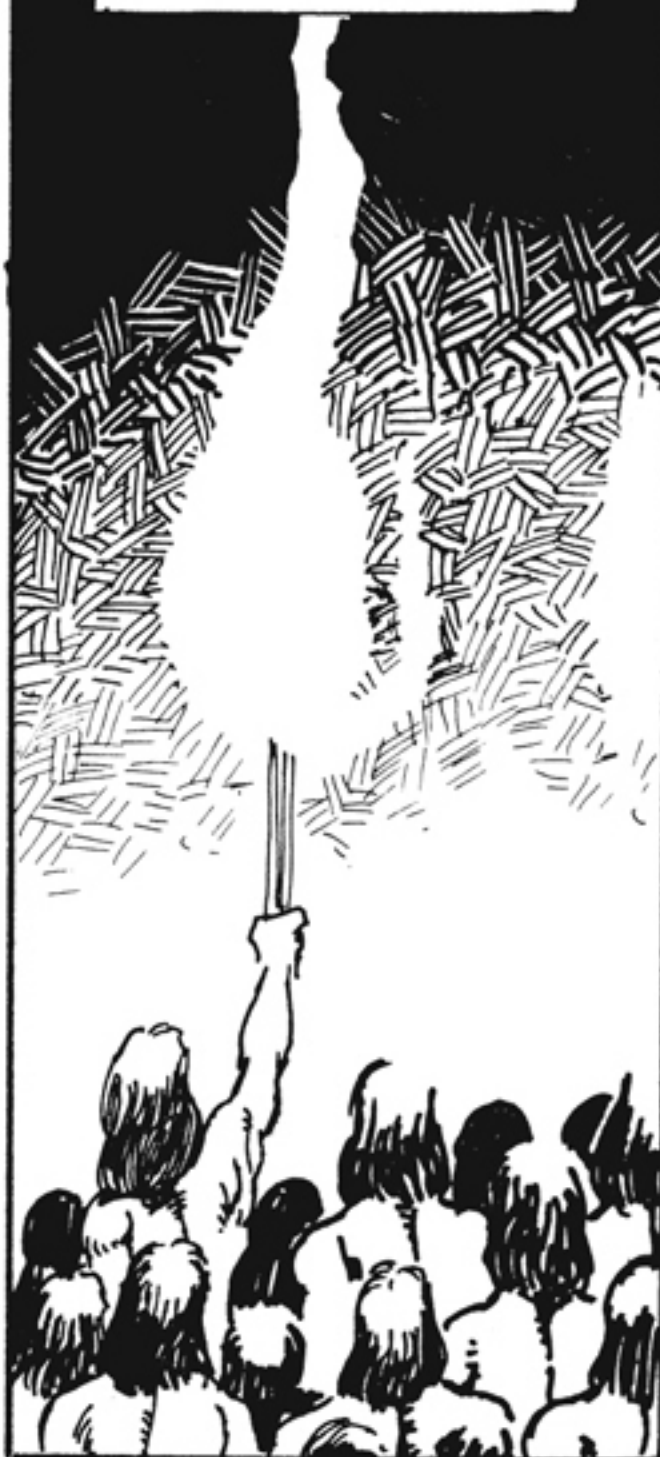
THE DIGT LEADER'S WORDS FADE TO A DISTANT HUM IN **CEREBUS'** EARS-- UNABLE TO TEAR HIS EYES AWAY FROM THE IDOL, HE LOSES HIMSELF IN HIS OWN MUSINGS...

"AM I THE REDEEMER?" HE DECIDES HE IS NOT. THE IDOL'S EYES REMAIN IMPASSIVE...



HE IS BROUGHT BACK TO REALITY BY THE SHOUTS OF THE DIGTS WHO HAVE BEGUN EXITING THE GREAT HALL...

EVIDENTLY THEIR MEETING IS AT AN END!



IN A FEW MOMENTS, THE CAVERNOUS ROOM IS EMPTY, HYSTERICAL SHOUTS AND LAUGHTER VANISHING ALONG THE ANCIENT CORRIDORS...



IN A FEW MOMENTS, THE GLOW OF THEIR TORCHES IS ALL THAT REMAINS...

...IN A FEW MOMENTS, NOT EVEN **THAT** REMAINS...



CEREBUS DESCENDED
THE NOW-DARKENED
STAIRWAY....



IT LOOMED IN THE
HALF-LIGHT...



HIS FOOTSTEPS, LIGHT THOUGH
THEY ARE, ECHO IN THE
TOMB-LIKE HALL....



THE STONE
IS EVEN
SOFTER
THAN IT
HAD AP-
PEARED
FROM A
DISTANCE.
CLAY
PERHAPS?

A GOD OF
CLAY--
CEREBUS
SHAKES
HIS HEAD
IN
DISGUST..

THERE
WAS NO
FATHOMING
THE HUMAN
MIND--
NO WAY
TO UNDER-
STAND HOW
THESE
CREATURES
THINK...

HE STANDS BEFORE
THE IDOL. IT SEEMS
DIMINISHED AT CLOSE
QUARTERS--A DEC-
ORATION, PERHAPS...

...BUT
A GOD?



TARIM, ASHTOTH, THESE
WERE GODS....THEY
BROUGHT WAR, PAIN,
THEY KILLED WITHOUT
REASON OR APOLOGY...

HE COULD
PORTRAY THE
REDEEMER!
HE COULD
LEAD THE
PIGS EAST

...
HE HAD
SEEN ARMIES
DRIVEN BY
RELIGIOUS
ZEAL....



WITH TWO
DOZEN OF
THOSE
HAND-
CRAFTED
WEAPONS



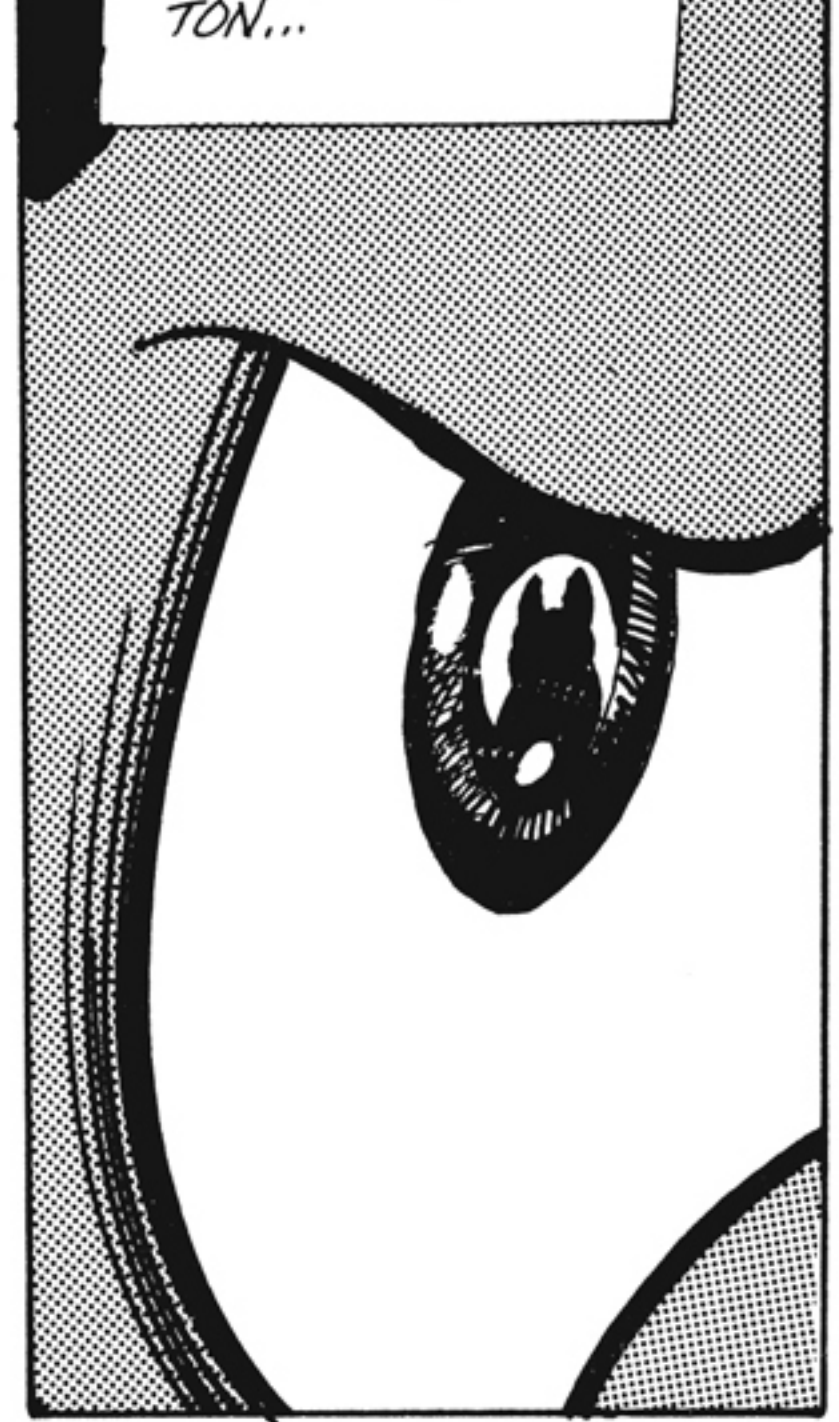
WE COULD
LAY WASTE
TO THE
PRIMITIVE
LANDS
EAST OF
THE
FELD...



THERE
WOULD BE
MORE
LOOT THAN
A KING
COULD
IMAGINE



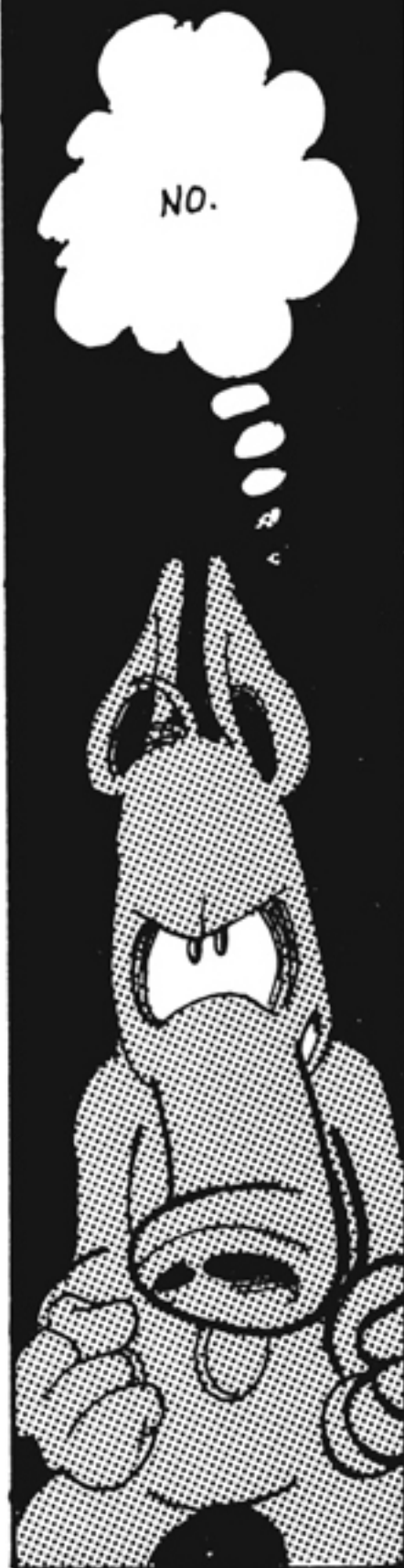
HE HAD ONLY TO
ACKNOWLEDGE
A KINSHIP TO THE
PIG GOD. THERE
WOULD BE GOLD
AND GEMS BY THE
TON...



MAYHAP THERE
IS A KINSHIP!
MAYHAP
CEREBUS **IS**
JUST ONE OF
THE PIG RACE
...MAYHAP HE
IS ONLY ONE
OF ... ONLY A ...




NO.




FOR A THOUSAND YEARS, THE
PIG HAS BEEN TENDED, EACH
LEADER FORBIDDING EVEN THE
MOST CASUAL TOUCH-- ALL FOR
BUT ONE REASON:

THE PIG IS COMPOSED OF
THE FLIMSIEST MATERIAL--
MATERIAL THAT IS NO MATCH
FOR THE PUNCHES OF AN
ENRAGED EARTH-PIG!





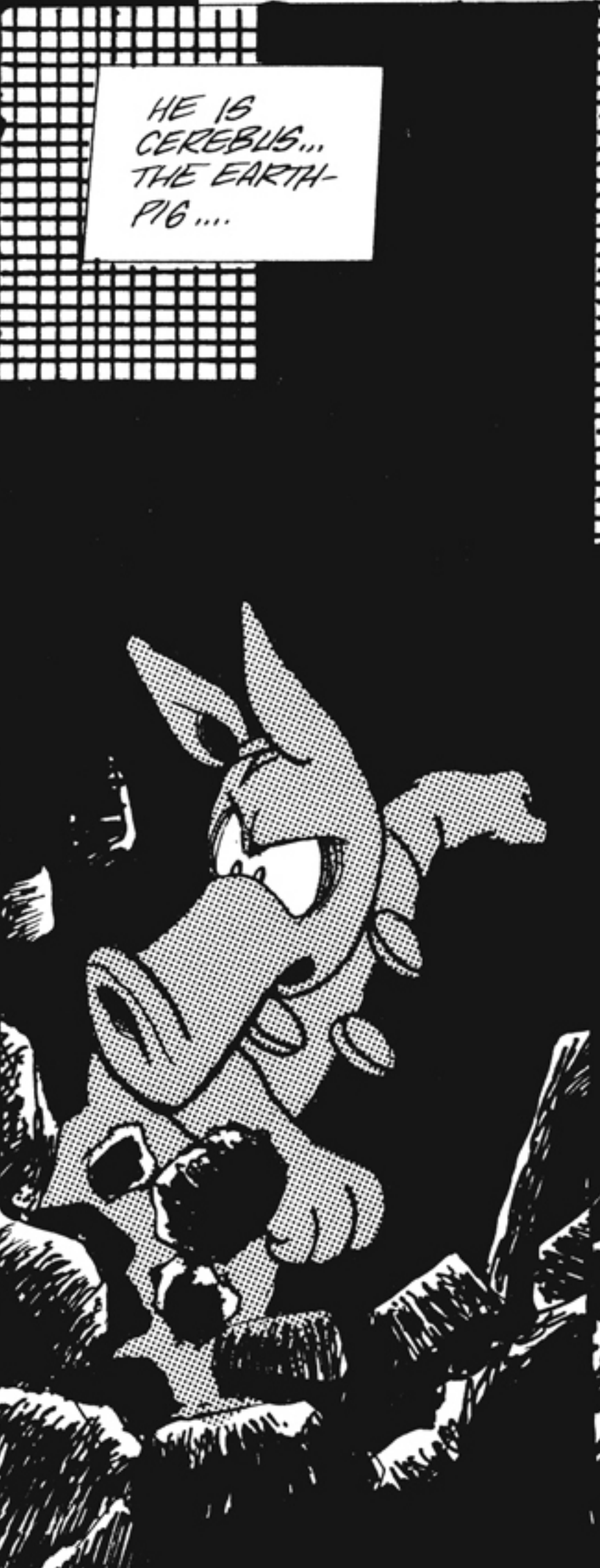
CEREBUS WILL NOT BE A
PIST. HE WILL ACKNOWLEDGE
NO KINSHIP WITH THE
SOFT GREY TRAVESTY
BEFORE HIM...



CEREBUS IS UNIQUE--HE
IS THE EARTH-PIG BORN!
HE IS NO REDEEMER OF
A MAD RACE THAT
WORSHIPS CLAY DEITIES!



HE IS
CEREBUS...
THE AARDVARK...



HE IS
CEREBUS...
THE EARTH-
PIG....



HE IS
CEREBUS...
THE VICTOR...

CEREBLUS LIFTS HIMSELF
FROM THE RUBBLE....
THERE IS NO SOUND
FROM THE CORRIDORS
BEYOND...



HIS ABSENCE WILL BE
NOTICED IN A VERY FEW
MINUTES...

...HE HURRIES TOWARD
A FAR EXIT...



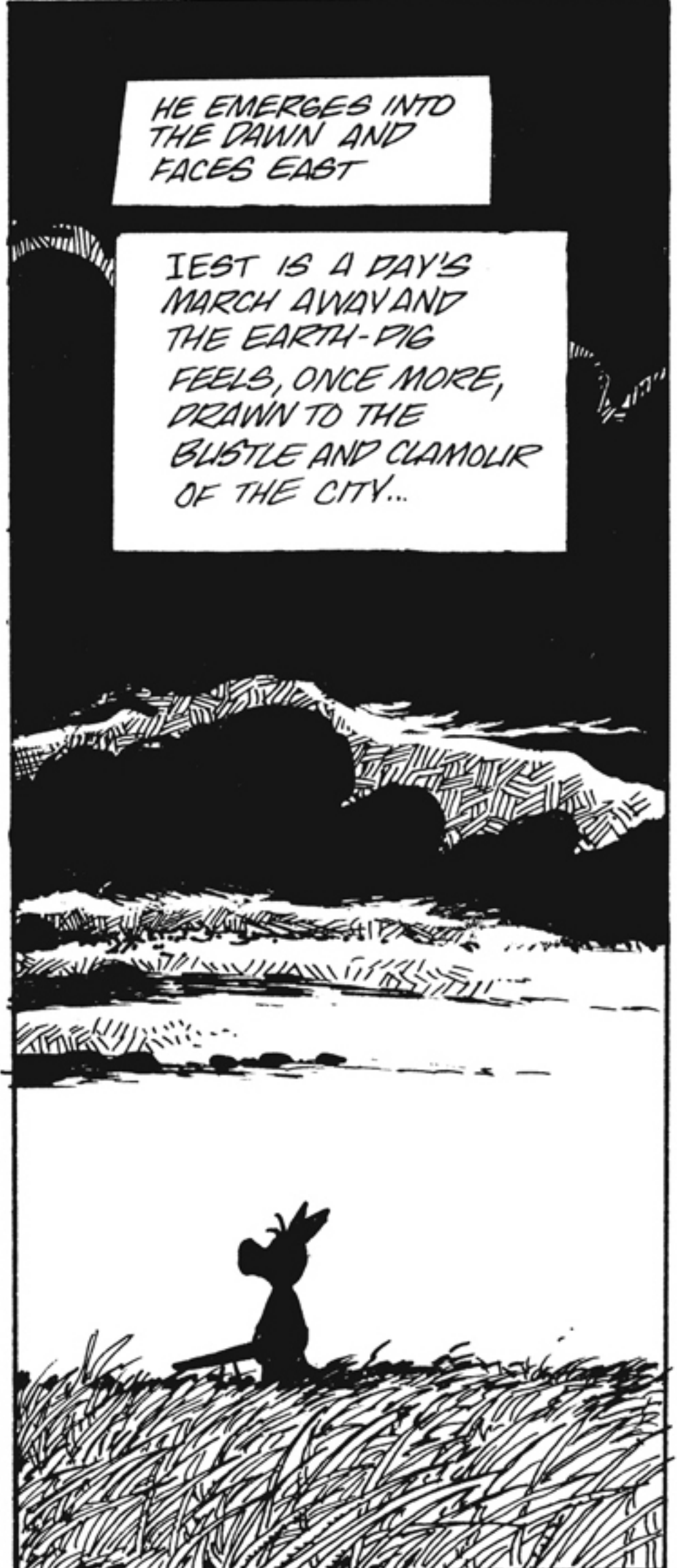
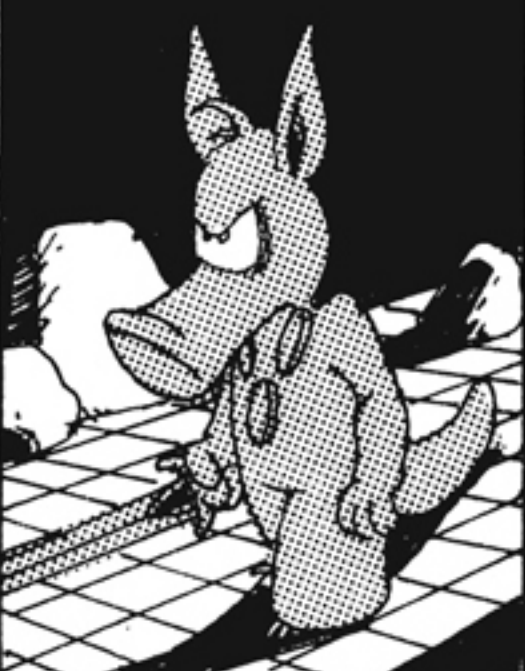
HE HAS SEEN
ENOUGH OF
RELIGIOUS
FANATICISM...
TO KNOW
THAT THE
PIGTS WILL
NOT BE
UNDERSTANDING
ABOUT THE
DESTRUCTION
OF A
CENTURIES-
OLD GOD
KING...

EXITS,
AS HE
WAS
TOLD,
PROLIFERATE
IN THE
UNDER-
GROUND
CHAMBERS

THE RAINS
HAVE
STOPPED...

HE EMERGES INTO
THE DAWN AND
FACES EAST

IT IS A DAY'S
MARCH AWAY AND
THE EARTH-PIG
FEELS, ONCE MORE,
DRAWN TO THE
BLISTLE AND CLAMOR
OF THE CITY...



cerebus the aardvark

HE STAGGERS
INTO VIEW,
HIS GAIT
AWKWARD
AND HALTING.



HE EDGES
ALONG THE
WALL, USING
IT FOR
SUPPORT.



JUST A
FEW MORE
BLOCKS
...



JUST
...A...



NO! NOT--NOW!
PLEASE!!!

I HAVE TO
TELL--HAVE
TO TELL!!!!
SOMEONE...

THE SECRET!







TARIM! IT NEVER FAILS -- TWO HOURS IN ANY OF THESE ACCURSED CITIES

AND SOME FARMER WITH MORE MUSCLE THAN BRAINS COMES FLYING AT ME...

MOTHER?

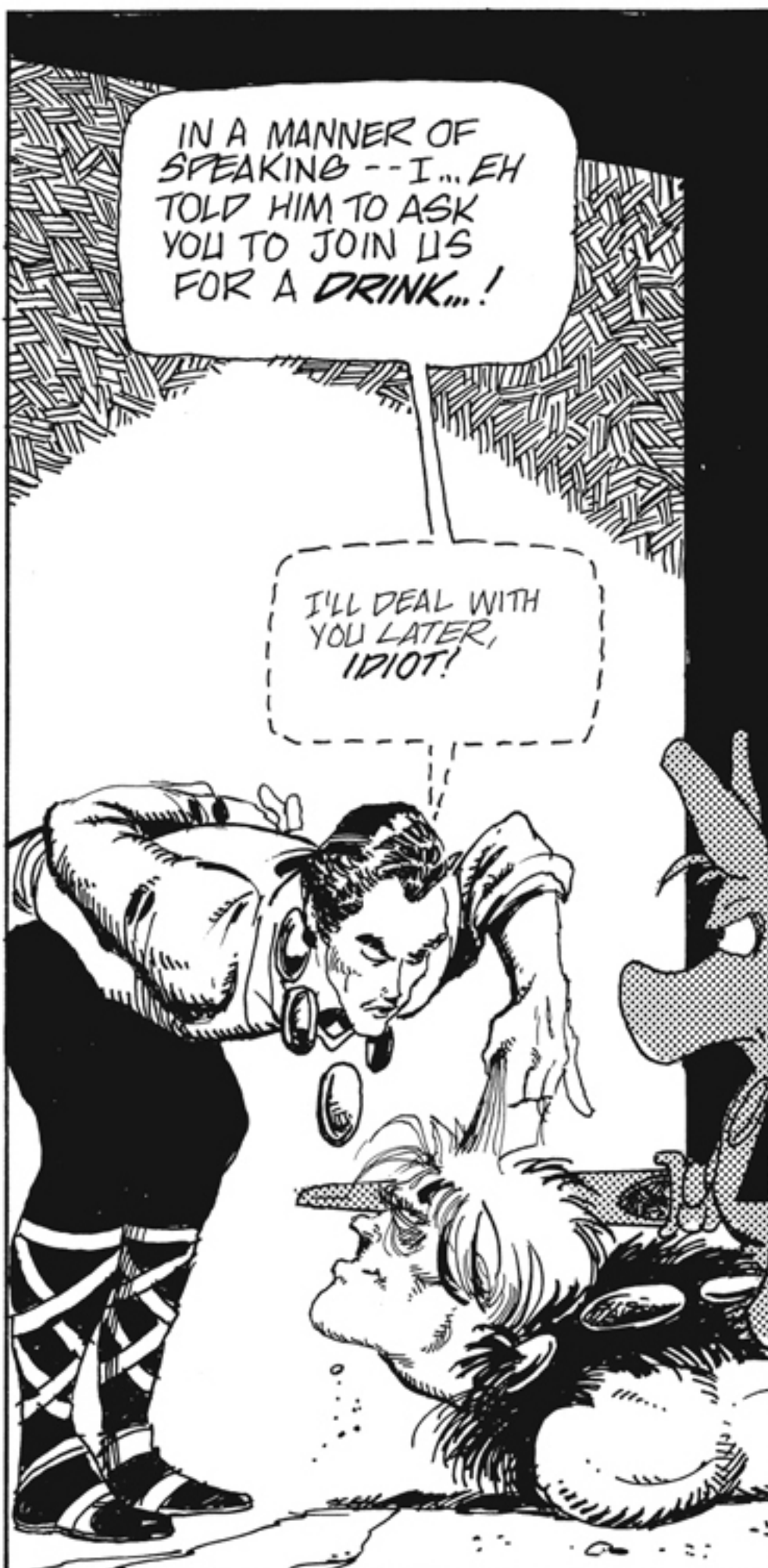


EH...

EXCUSE ME?



DOES THIS OXEN-BREATHED GLOB BELONG TO YOU, WIMP?



IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING -- I... EH TOLD HIM TO ASK YOU TO JOIN US FOR A *DRINK*...!

I'LL DEAL WITH YOU LATER, IDIOT!



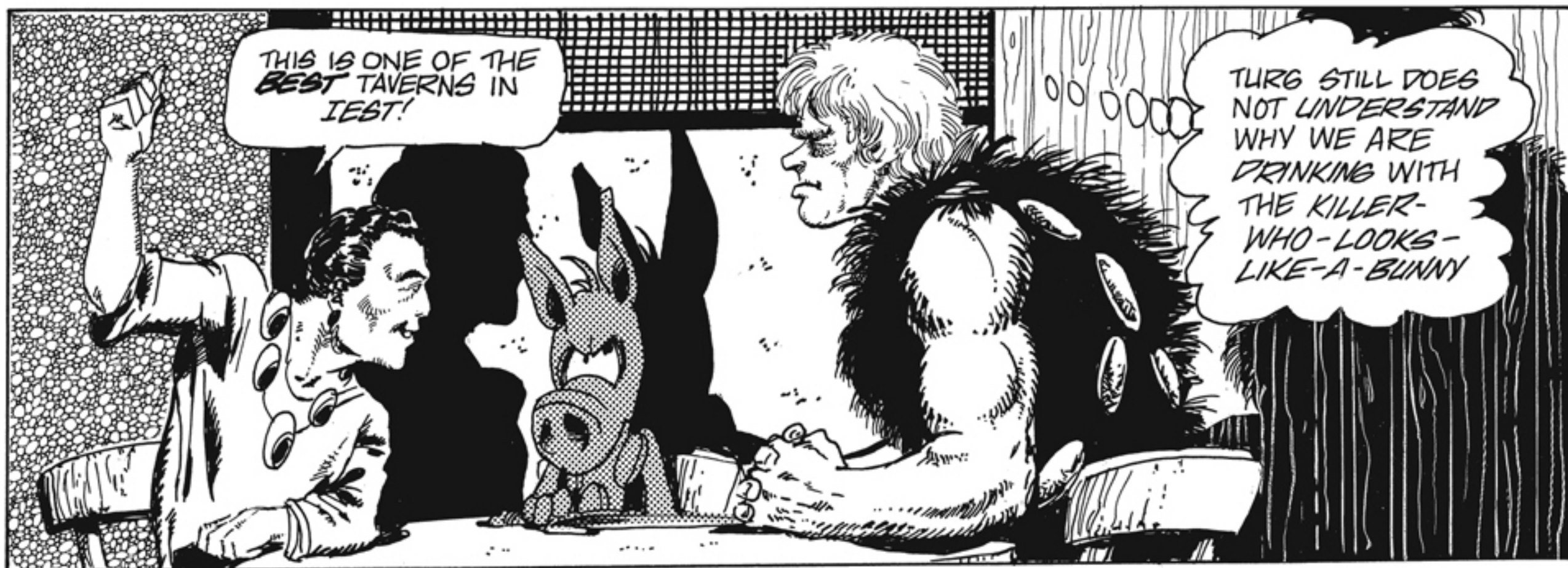
IT WOULD APPEAR HE GOT TOO CARRIED AWAY OR... *SOMETHING*.

IF YOU WILL GRAB A *LEG*, THOUGH...



CEREBUS' SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED ...

BUT ARE VERY QUICKLY REPRESSED BY HIS ENORMOUS THIRST...

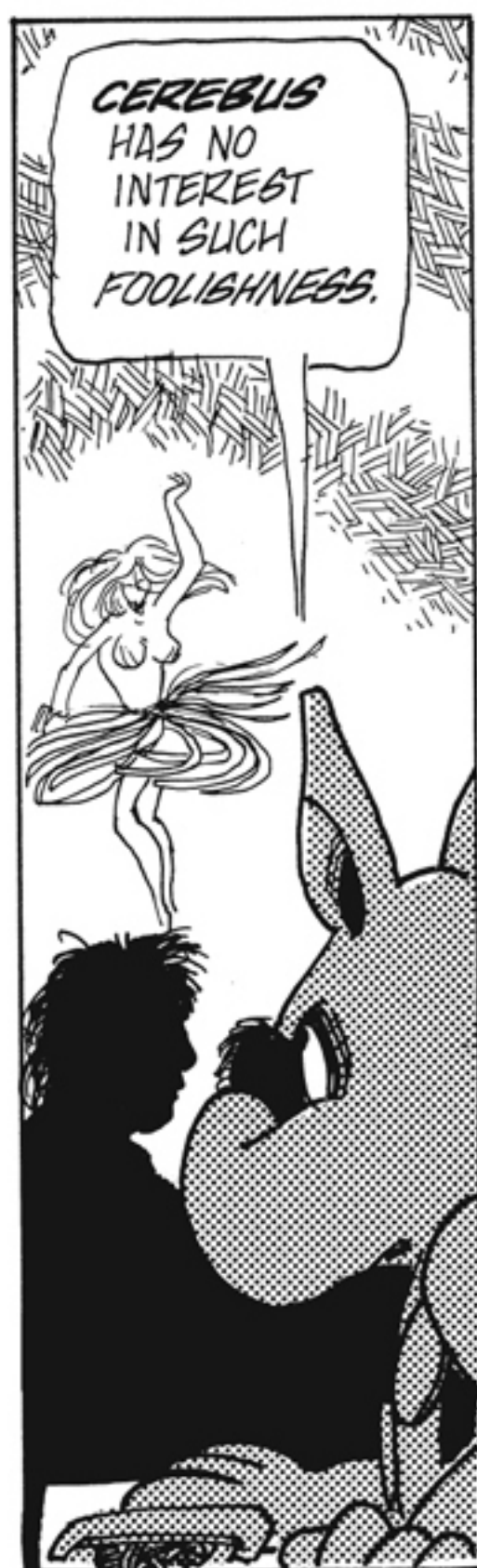


THIS IS ONE OF THE
BEST TAVERNS IN
TEST!

TURG STILL DOES
NOT UNDERSTAND
WHY WE ARE
DRINKING WITH
THE KILLER-
WHO-LOOKS-
LIKE-A-BUNNY



OF COURSE
THE MAIN
ATTRACTION
IS JAKA...



CEREBUS
HAS NO
INTEREST
IN SUCH
FOOLISHNESS.

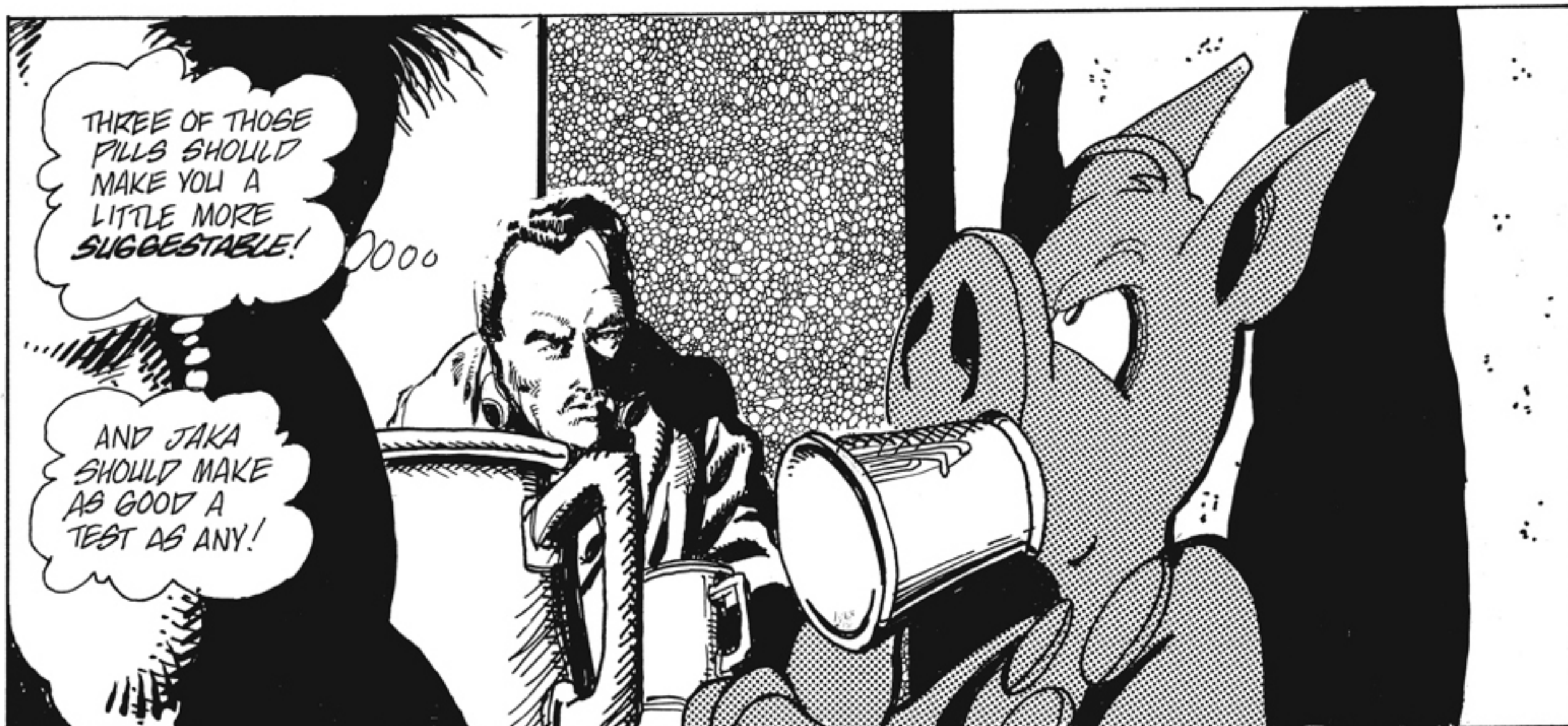


EXCELLENT!

AH! OUR
ALES HAVE
ARRIVED!

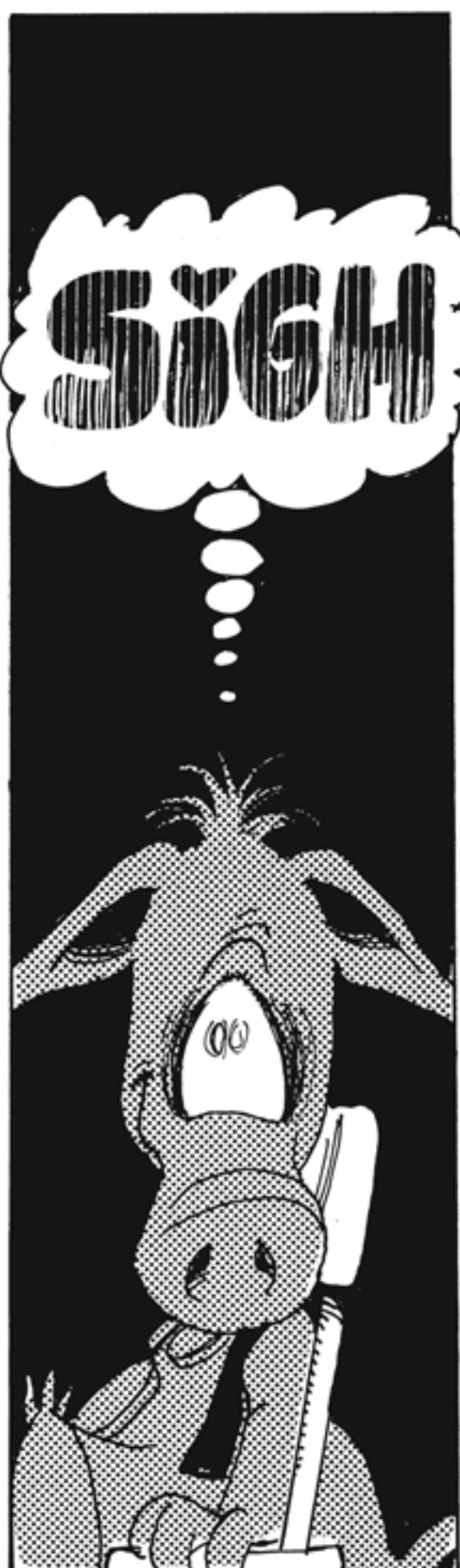


NOW MY LITTLE
GRAY FRIEND--
LET'S SEE IF
YOUR MIND CAN
BE CHANGED
ABOUT JAKA!



THREE OF THOSE
PILLS SHOULD
MAKE YOU A
LITTLE MORE
SUGGESTABLE!

AND JAKA
SHOULD MAKE
AS GOOD A
TEST AS ANY!





COME
ALONG,
CEREBUS
-- WE'RE
GOING OUT
FOR A
LITTLE
....



...CHAT?

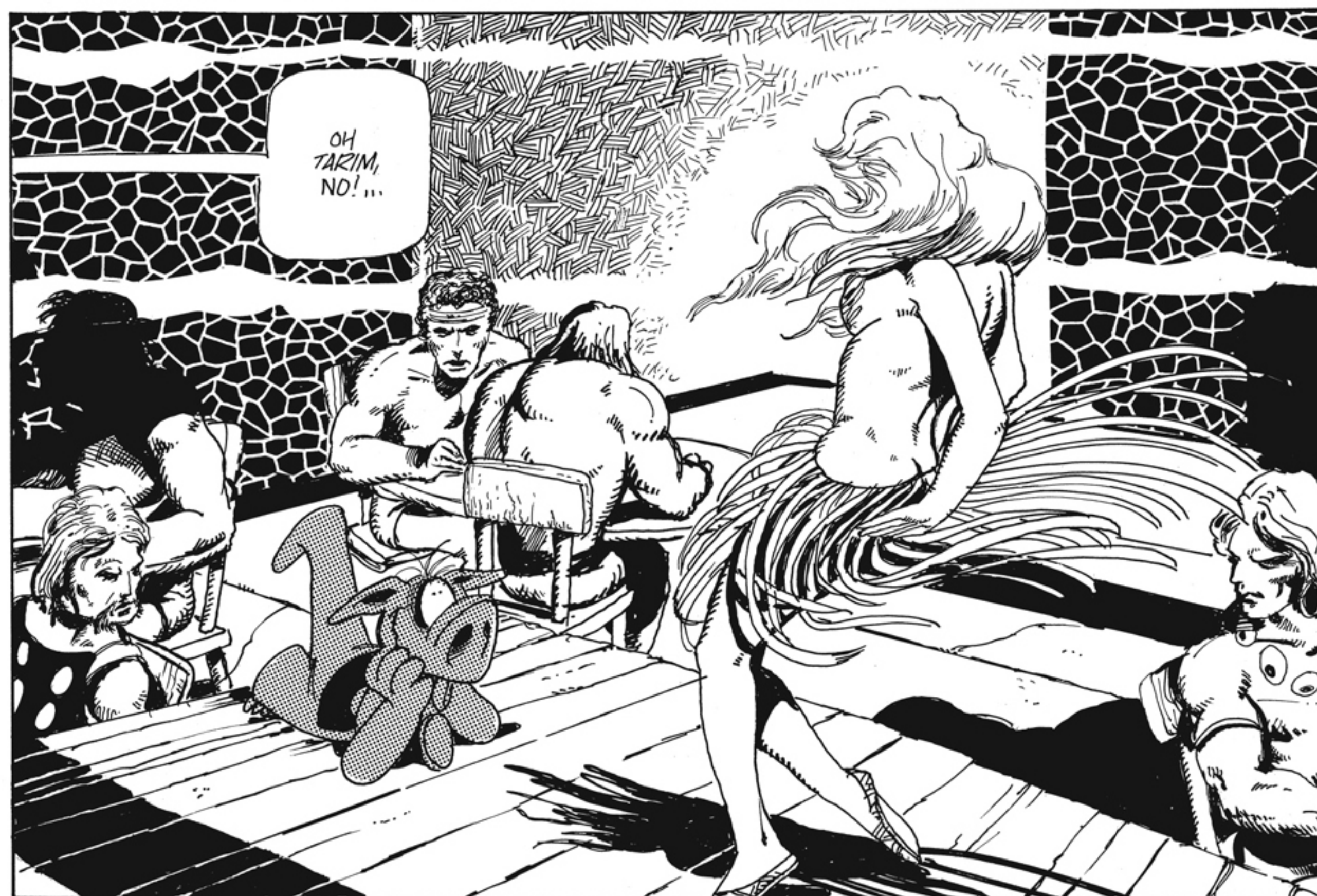


HE'S
GONE!



TURG! HE'S GONE! OUR
ONE-WAY TICKET TO A
KING'S RANSOM IN GOLD
IS GONE! WHERE, TURG?
WHERE COULD HE HAVE...

unh?



OH
TARIM,
NO!...



CEREBUS!
COME ON!
WE HAVE TO
TALK ABOUT
SOMETHING!



YOU CAN *STOP*
WATCHING THE
SHOW! WE
HAVE TO...



UMPH!



MY...
GOD



ARE YOU
OKAY, E'LASS?

NEVER MIND-- WE
NEED SOMEONE
TO TALK TO
CEREBUS--
GET HIM TO
COME WITH US

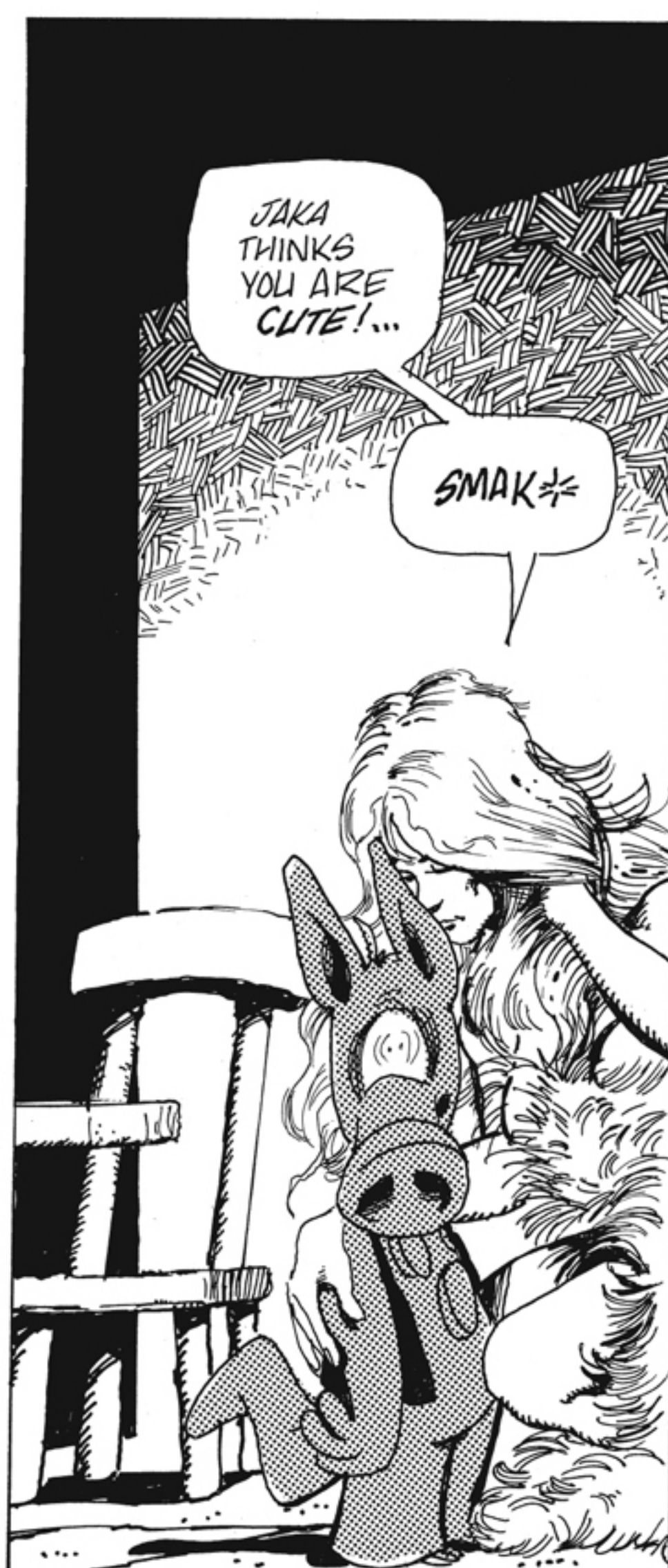


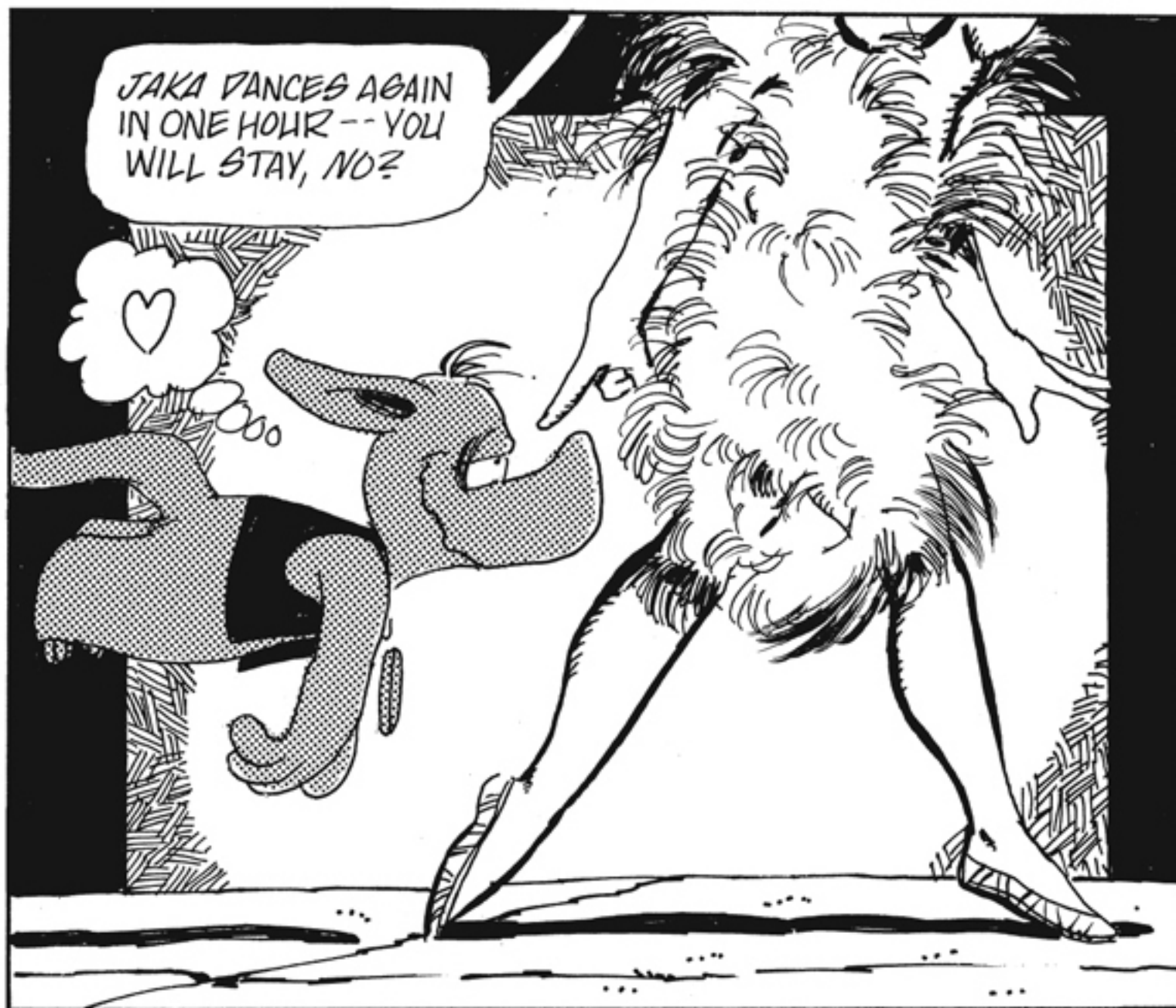
DUH-- YES!
WE NEED
SOMEONE
...TO...
TALK...
T...*

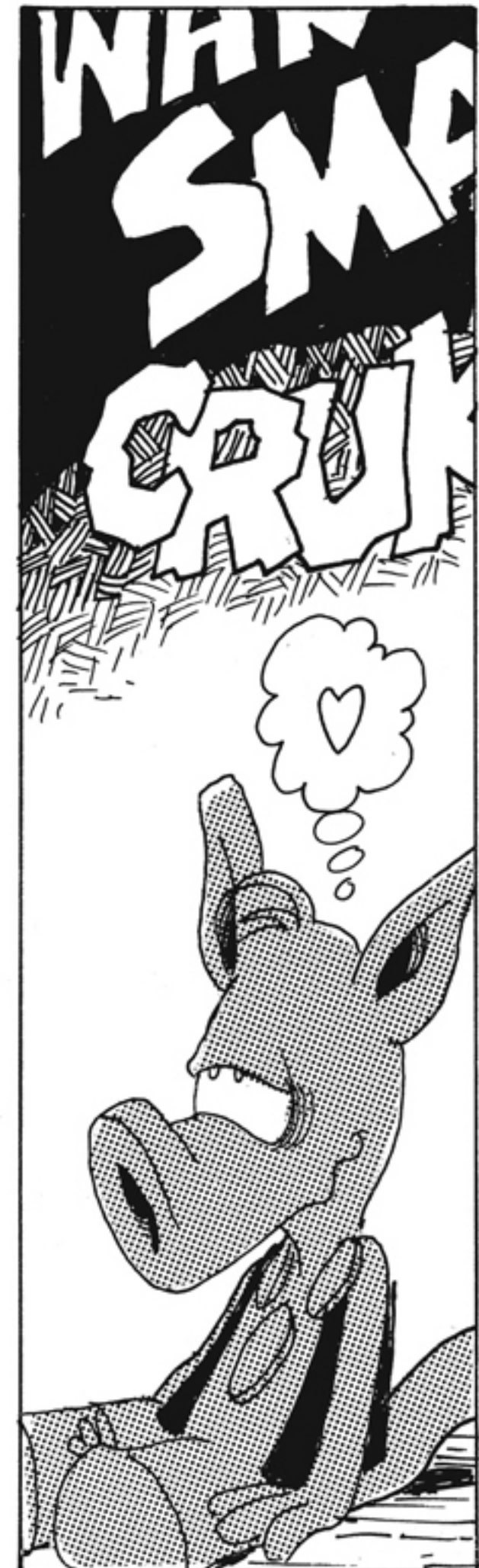
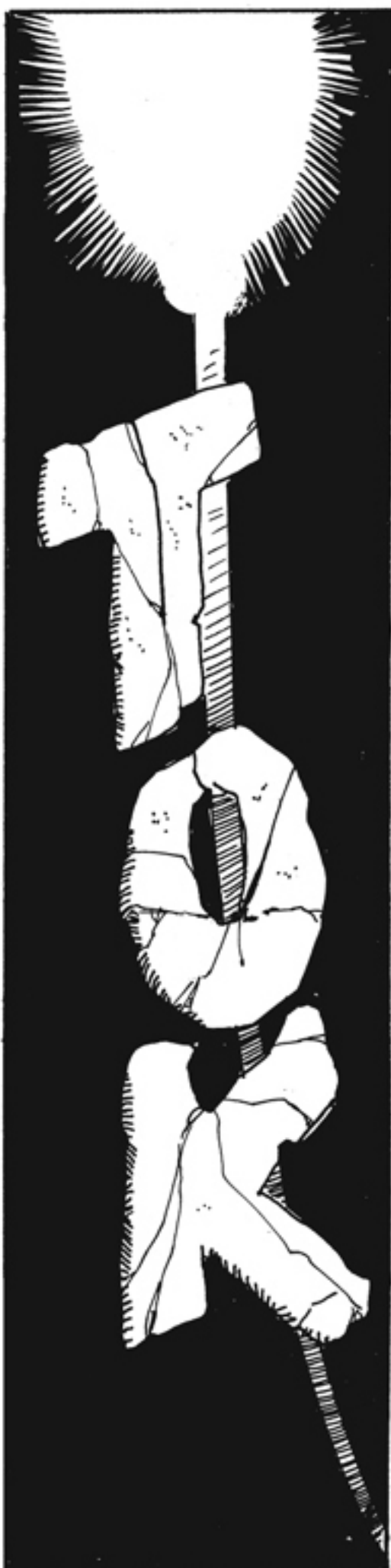
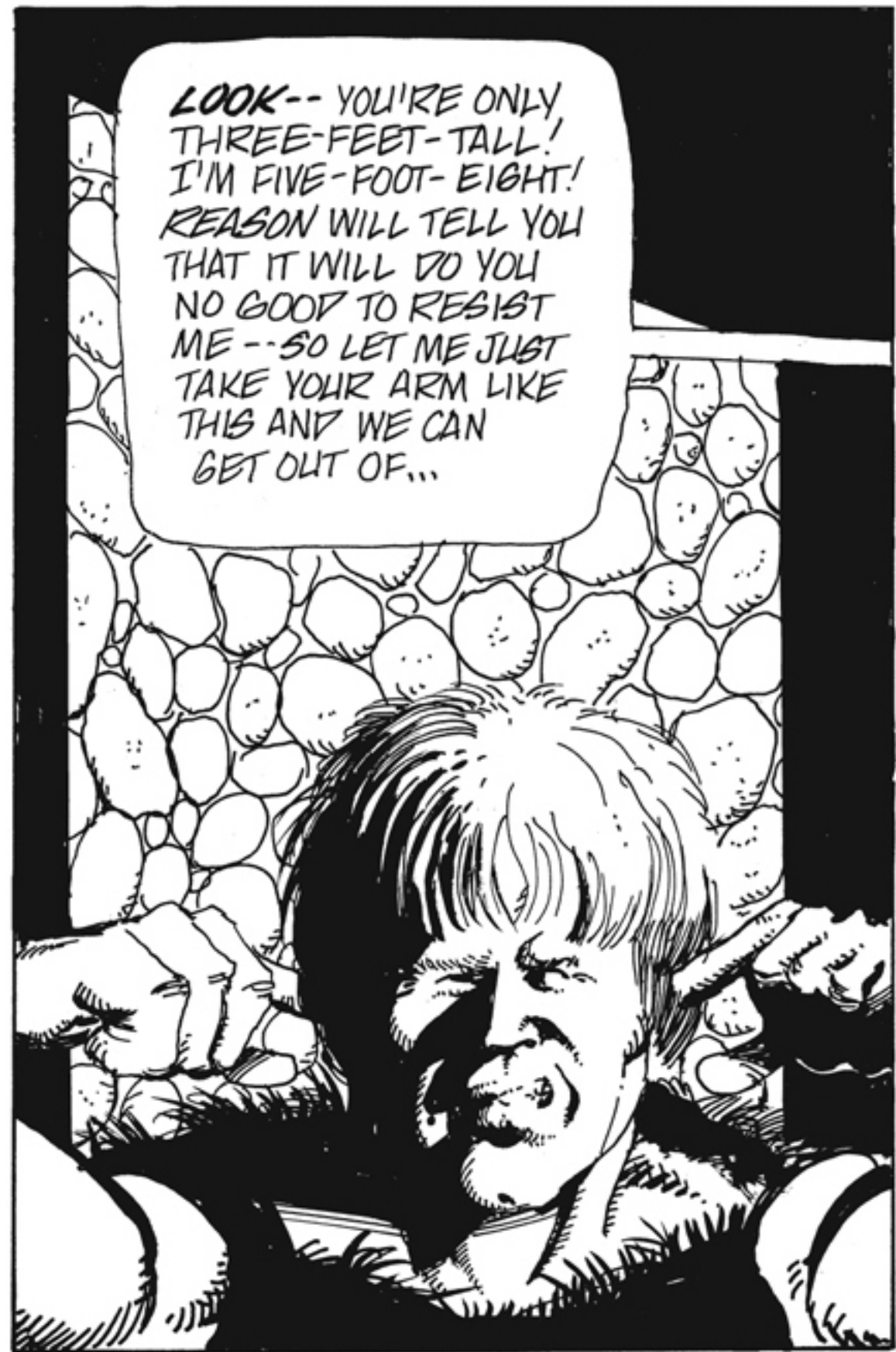


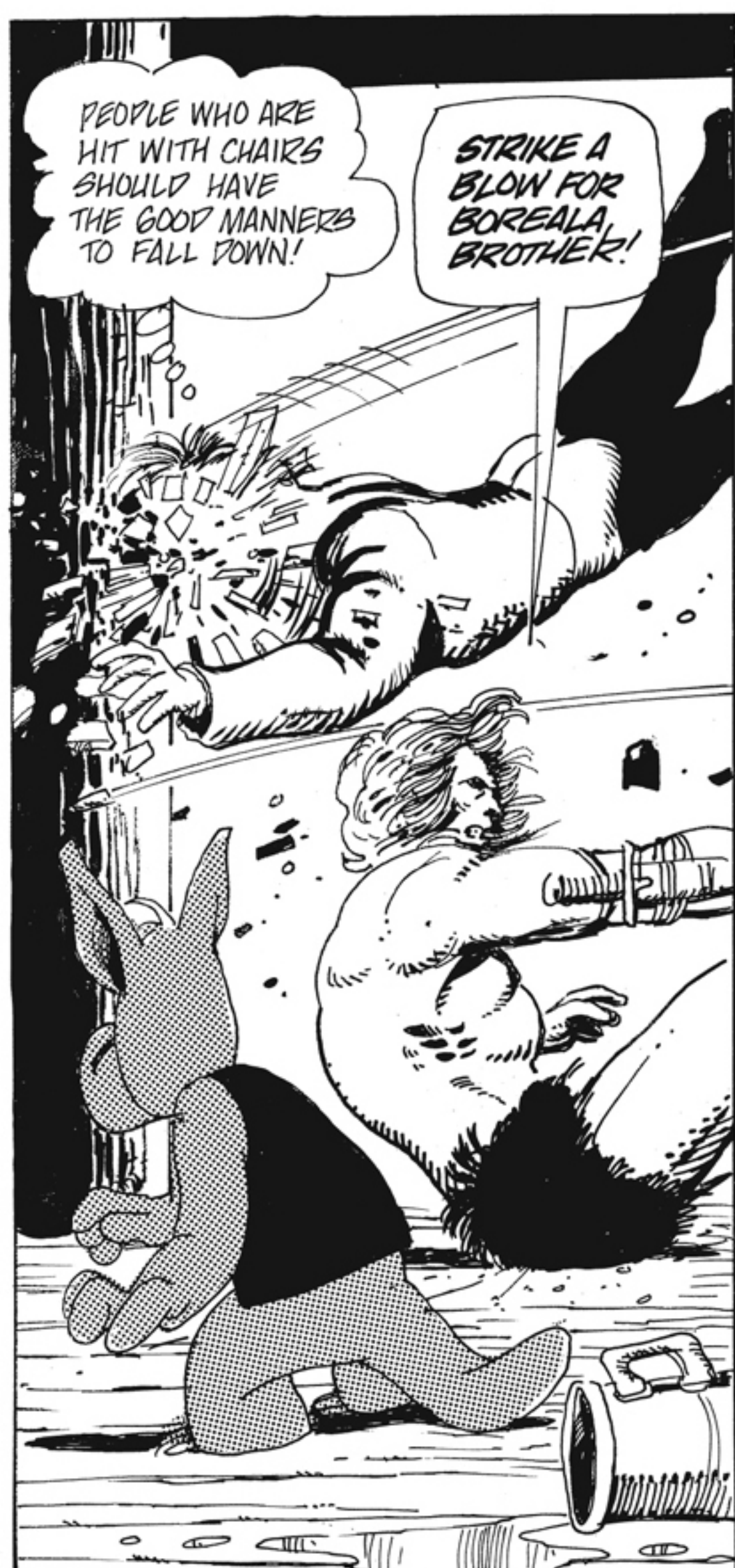
AWW-- NO, E'LASS-- PLEASE!
TURB IS STILL SORE FROM
HIS LAST TALK WITH THE
KILLER-WHO-LOOKS-LIKE-
A-BUNNY...

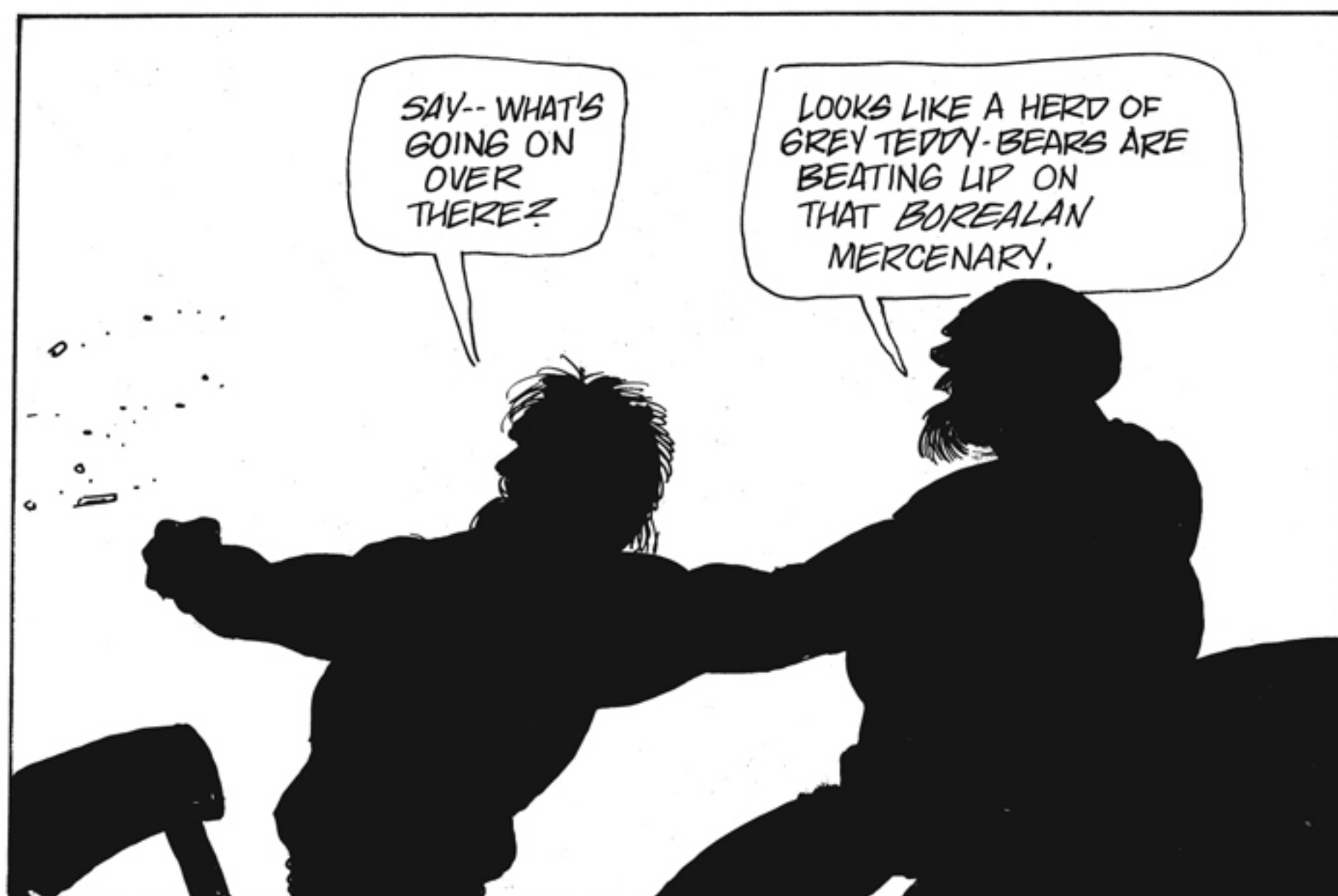
STOP *SNIVELLING*!
HE JUST CAUGHT
YOU OFF-GUARD
LAST TIME...



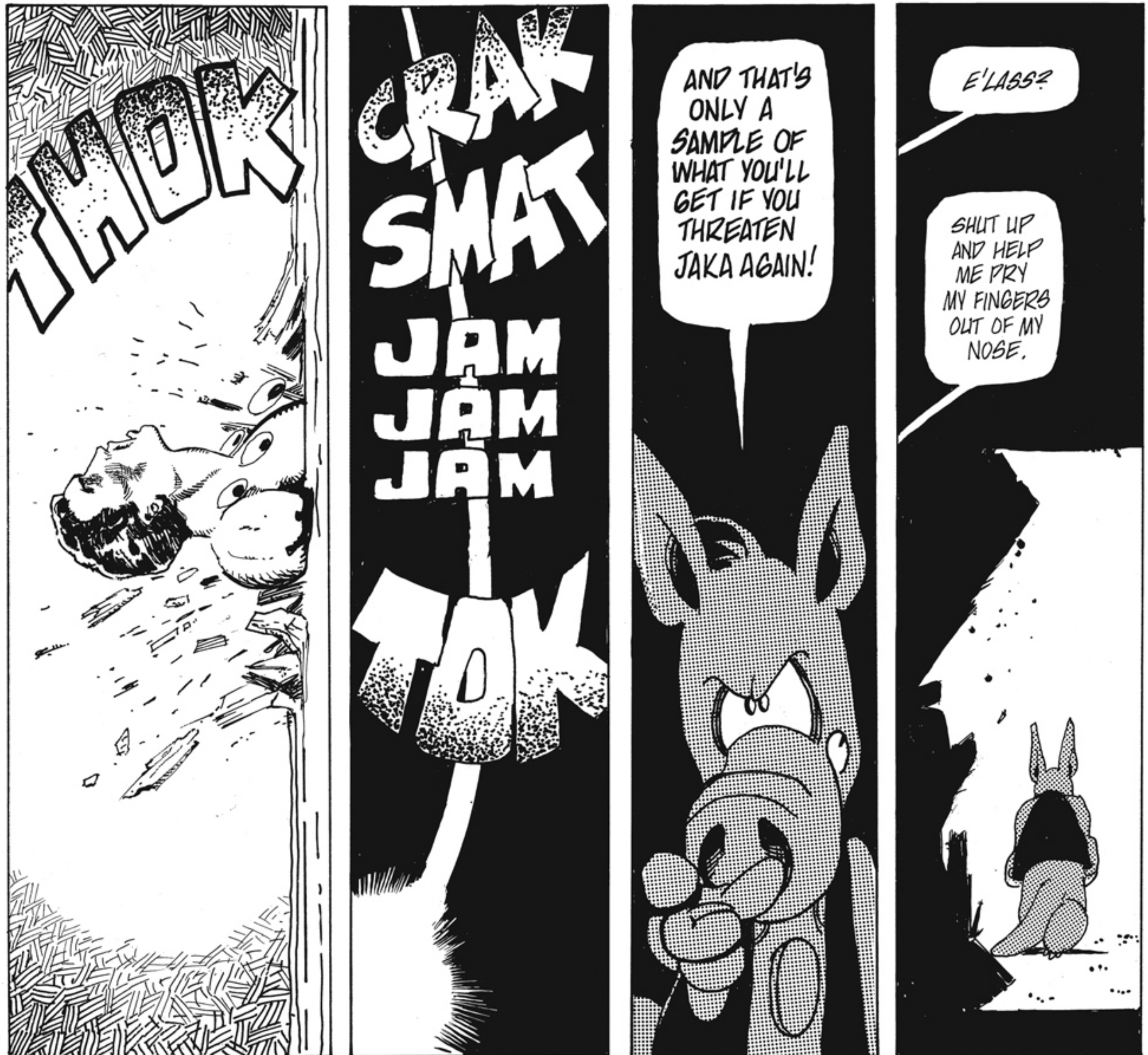
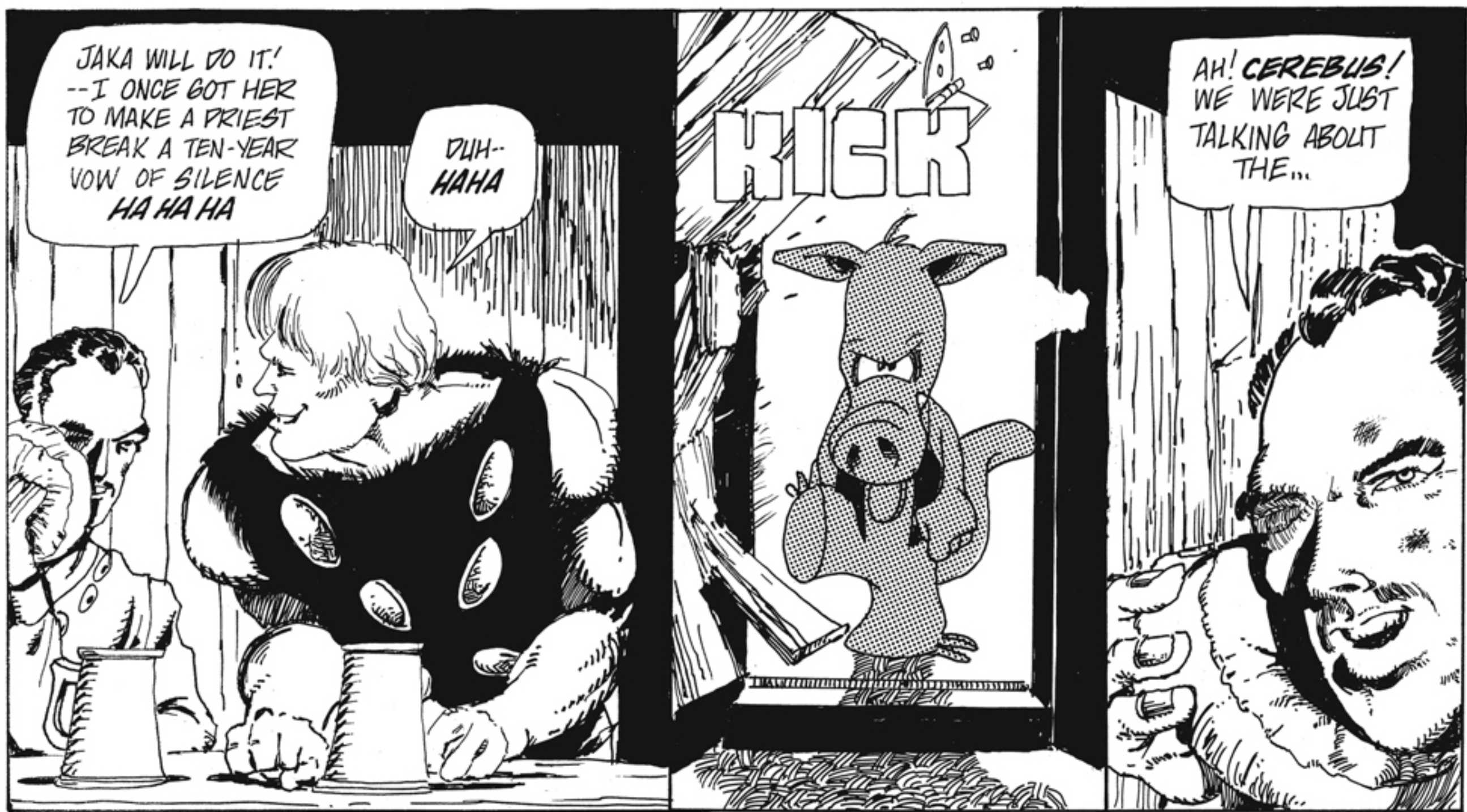


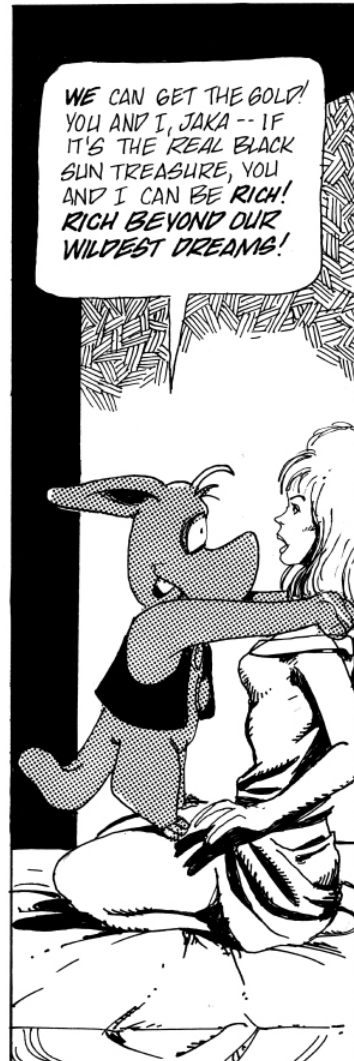
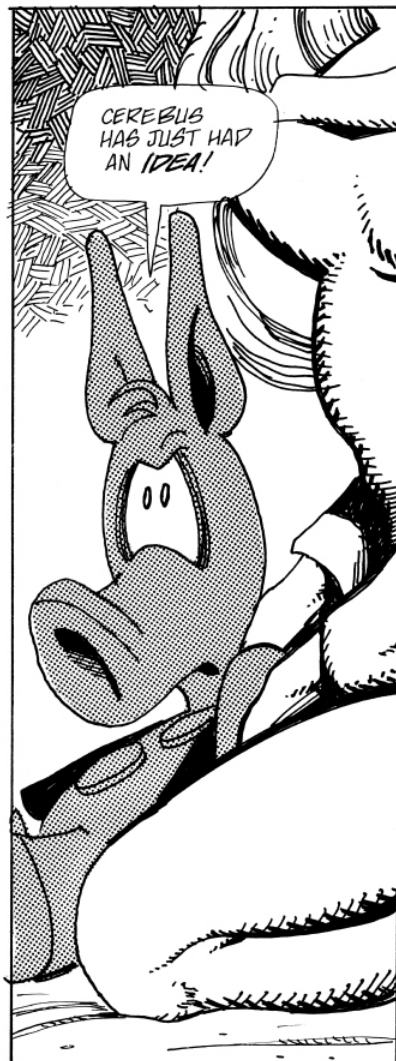
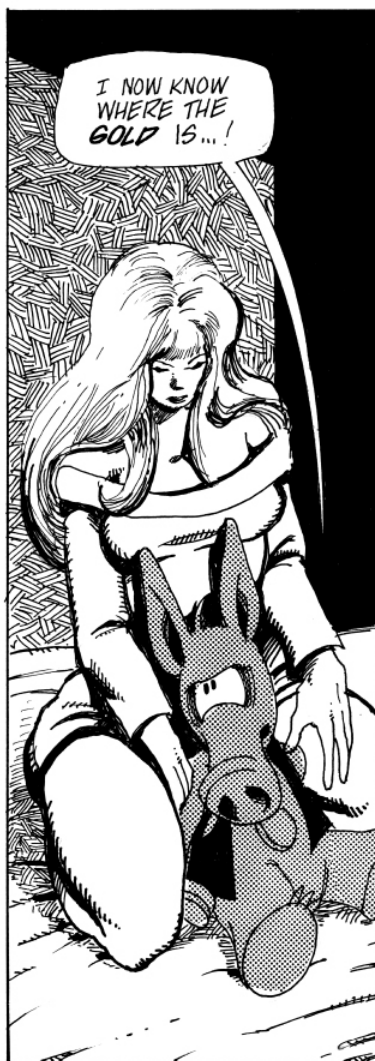
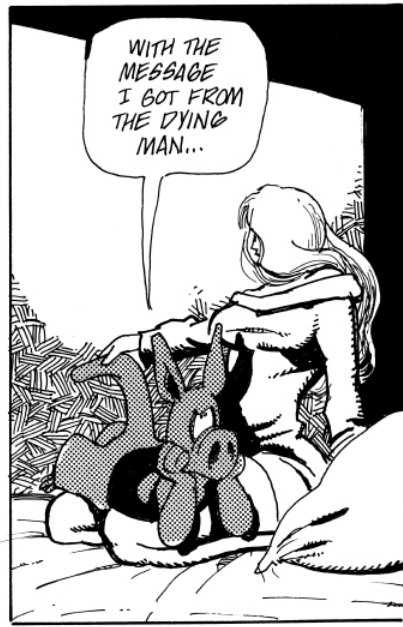


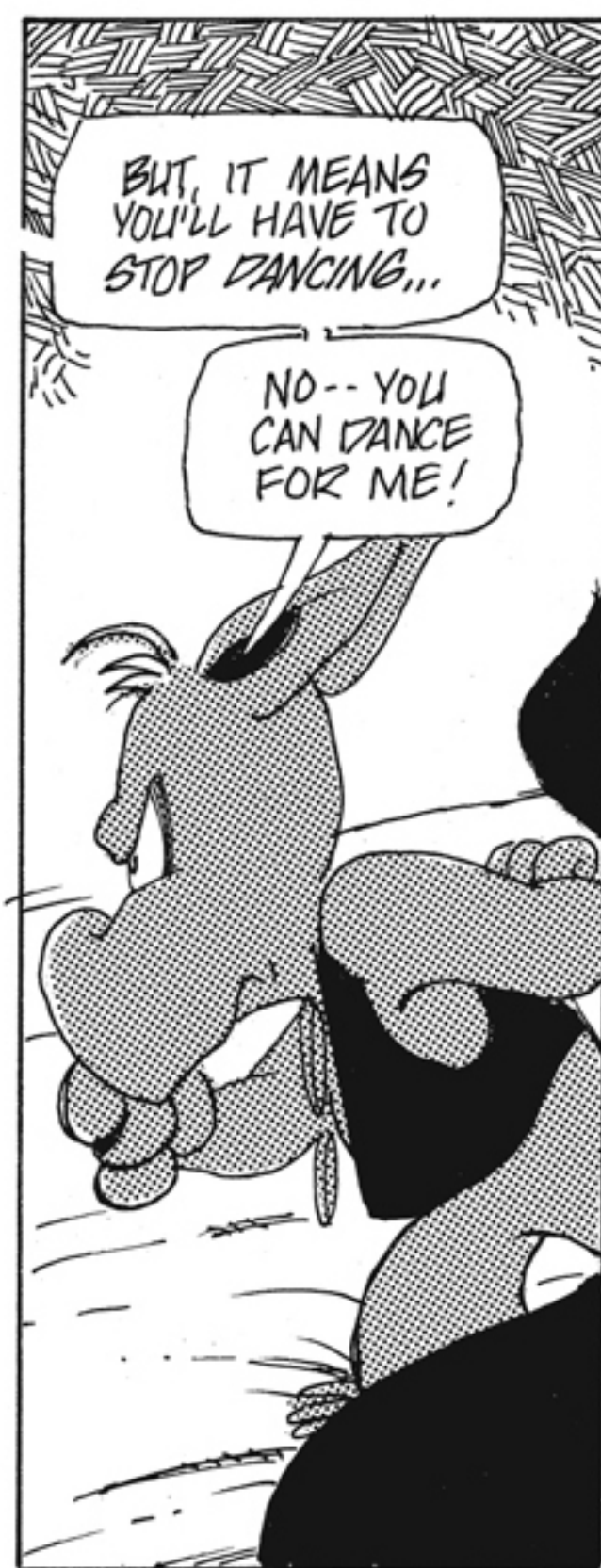
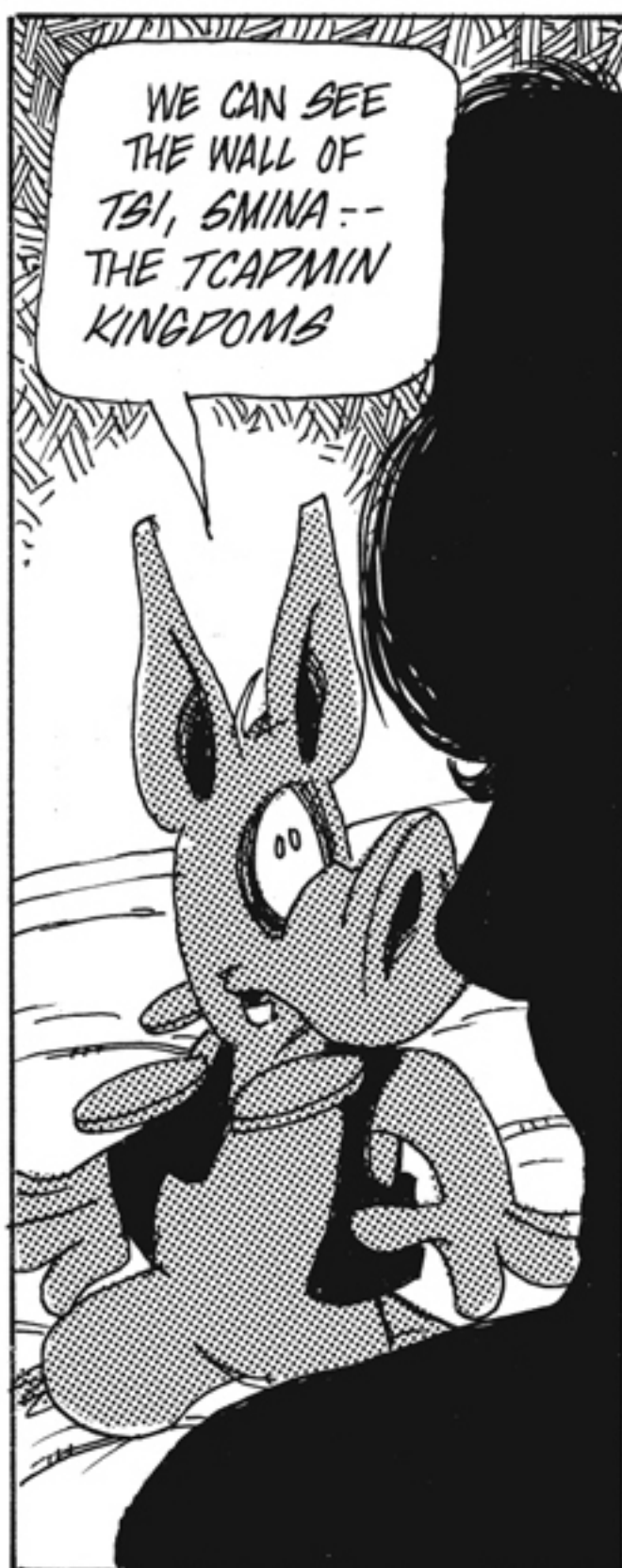














WE HAVE TO GET TO HIM,
TURG. THOSE PILLS WILL
BE WEARING OFF VERY
SOON.



HE THINKS HE'S
BEATEN US, TURG!
HAHAHA!

DUH--
HAHAHA



LITTLE DOES HE SUSPECT
THAT, EVEN NOW I'M
WORKING ON AN INFALLIBLE
MASTER PLAN! HE'LL FIND
E'LESS CAN TAKE A PUNCH
AND BOUNCE RIGHT....

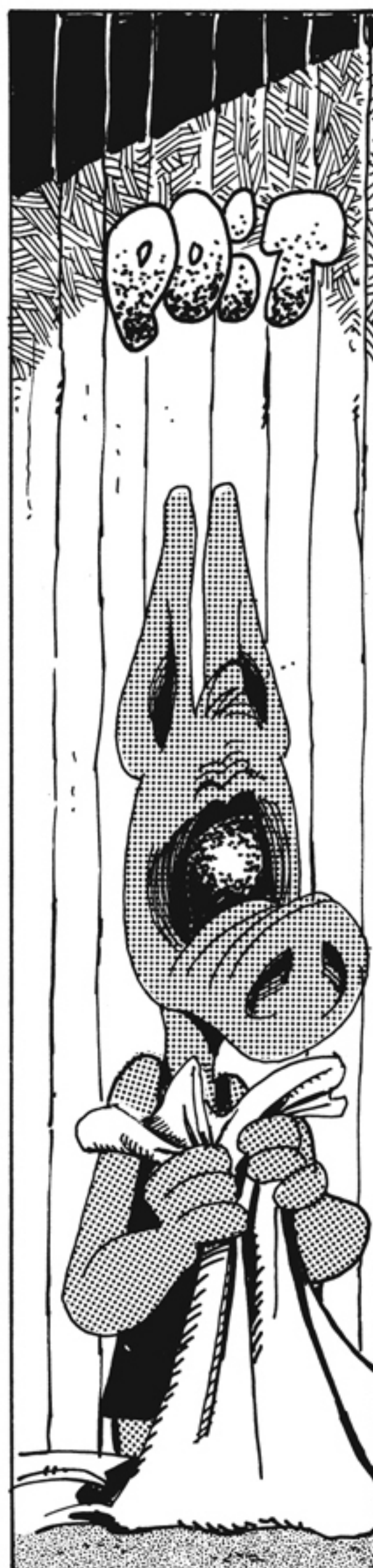
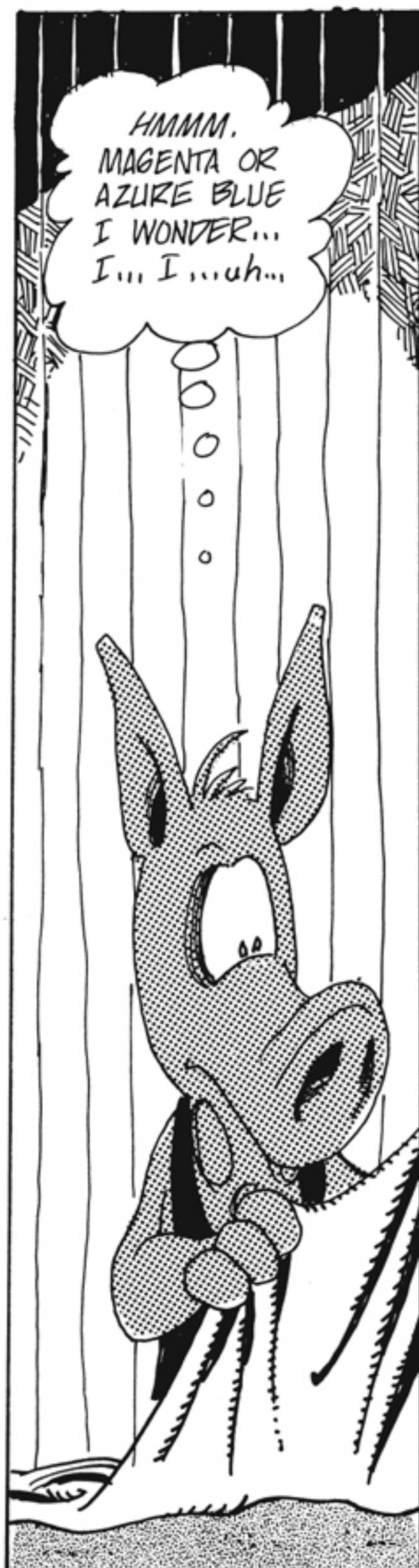
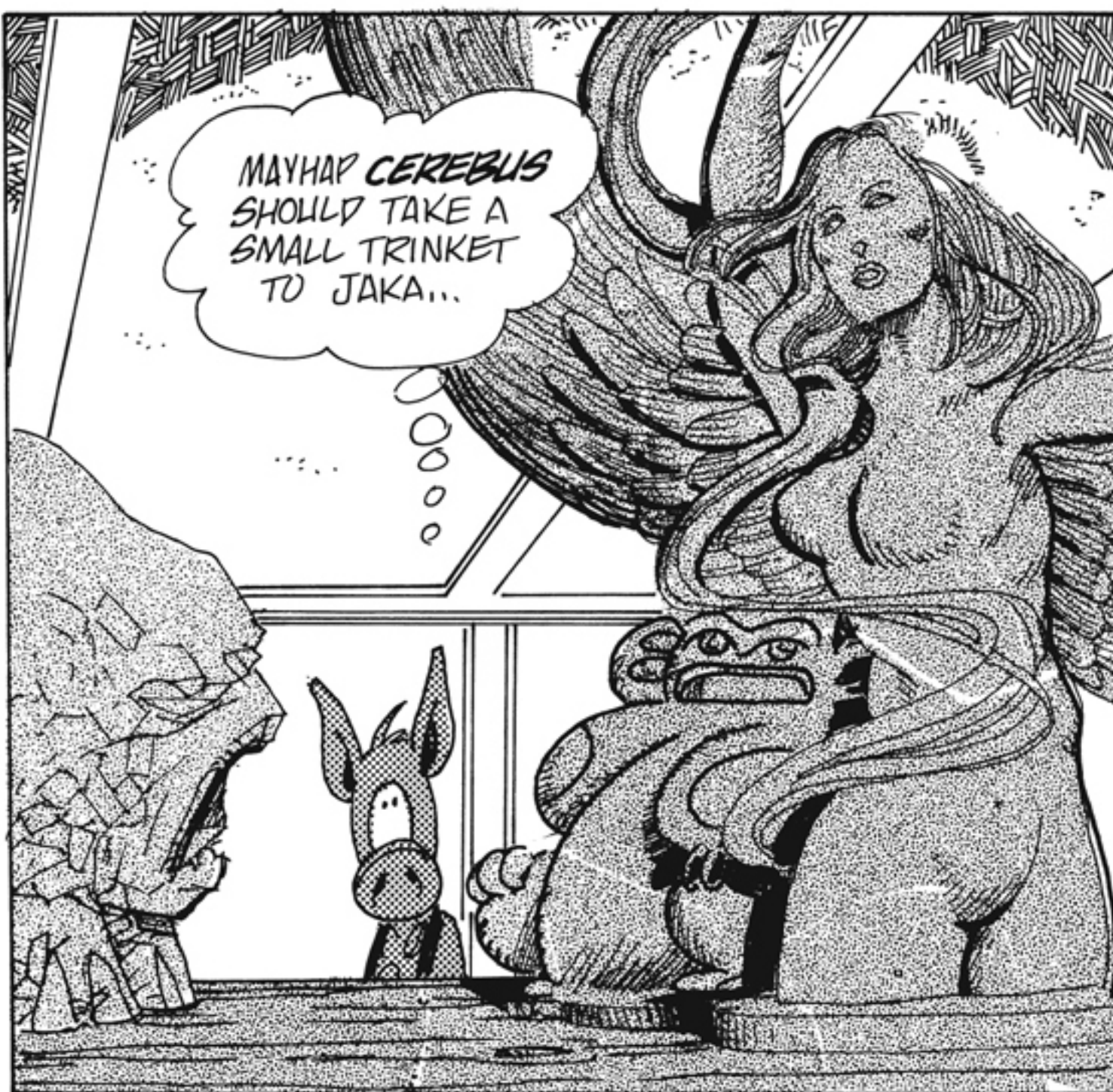
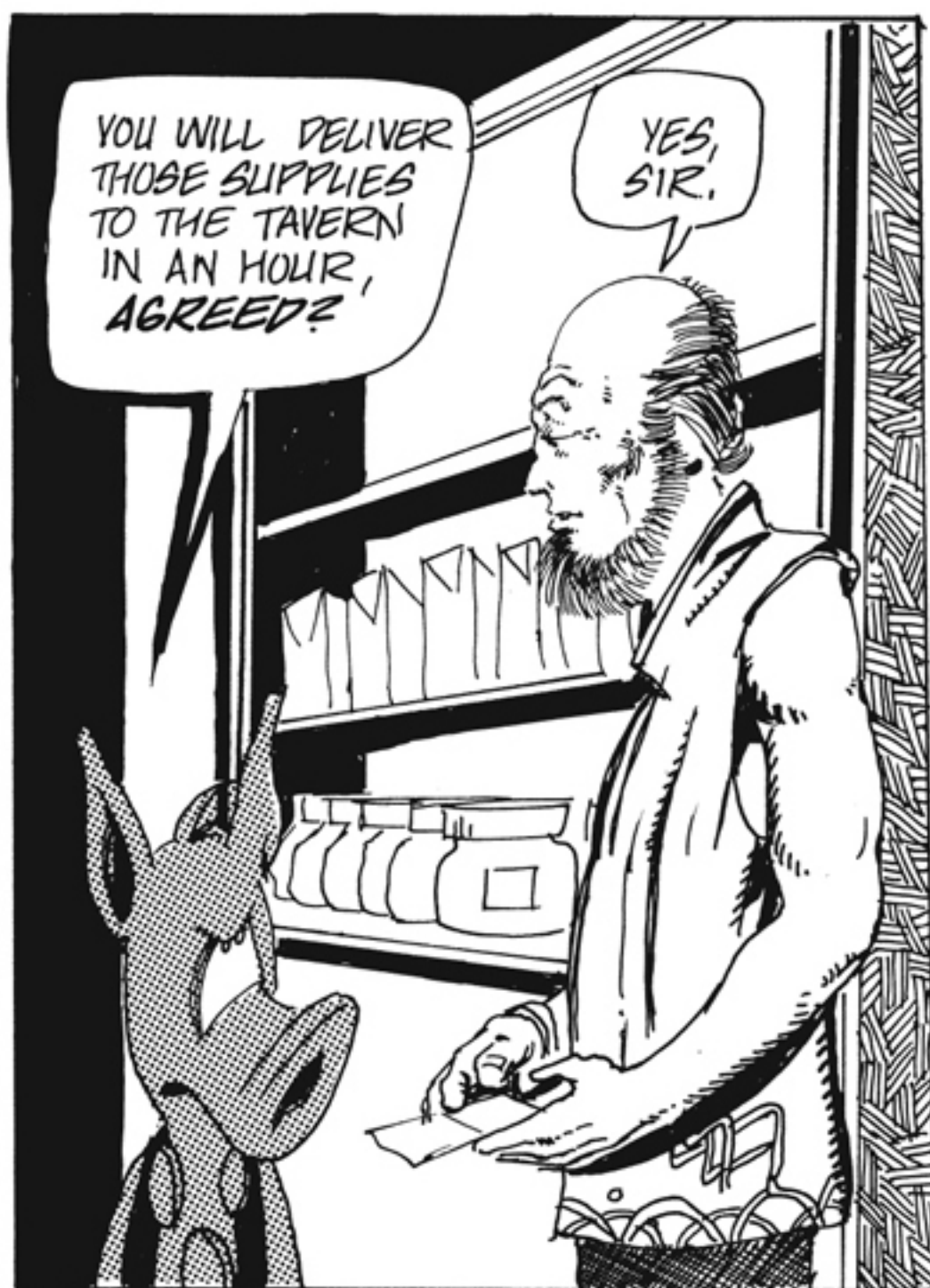


TURG THINKS
YOU SHOULD
REST.

NONSENSE.
WE HAVE
BUSINESS
TO DO.

WE'LL TRY
BLUFFING
HIM!







PERHAPS YOU SHOULD WAIT UNTIL YOUR NECK IS STRONG ENOUGH TO SUPPORT YOUR HEAD, E'LESS!



I'LL BE FINE TURB! I JUST NEED YOU TO GUIDE ME...



JAKA HAS MOVED TO ONE OF THESE ROOMS! CEREBUS IS PROBABLY WITH HER!

I'LL TRY THE FIRST ONE...



GOOD LUCK, E'LESS.

I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE! ...



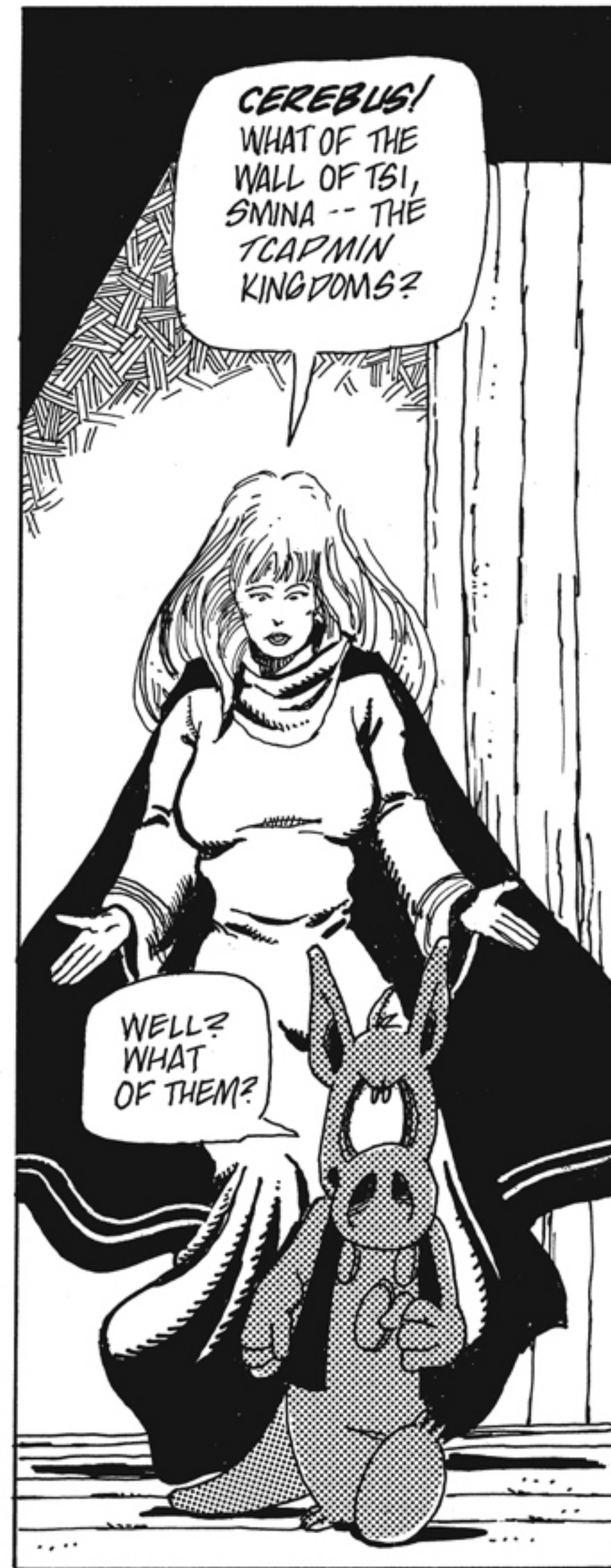
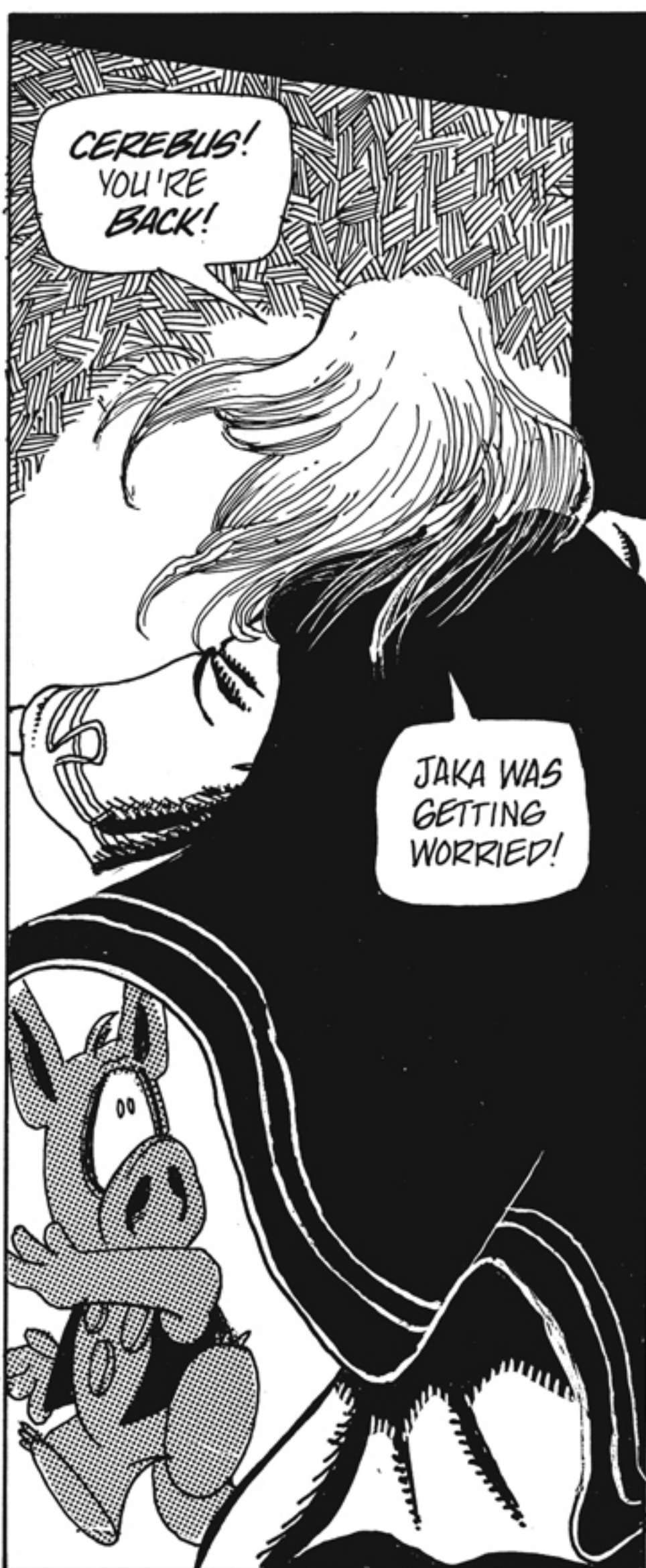
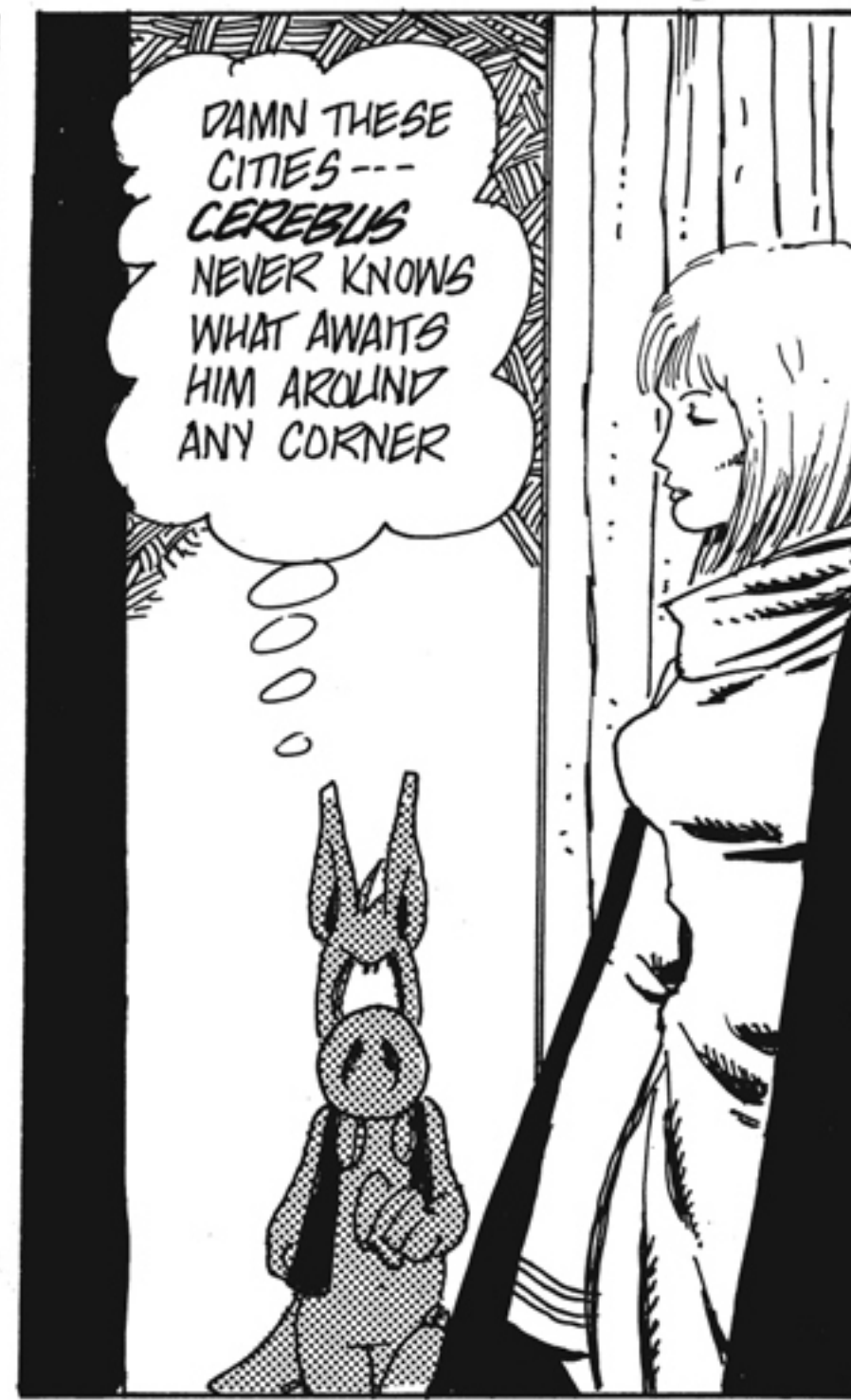
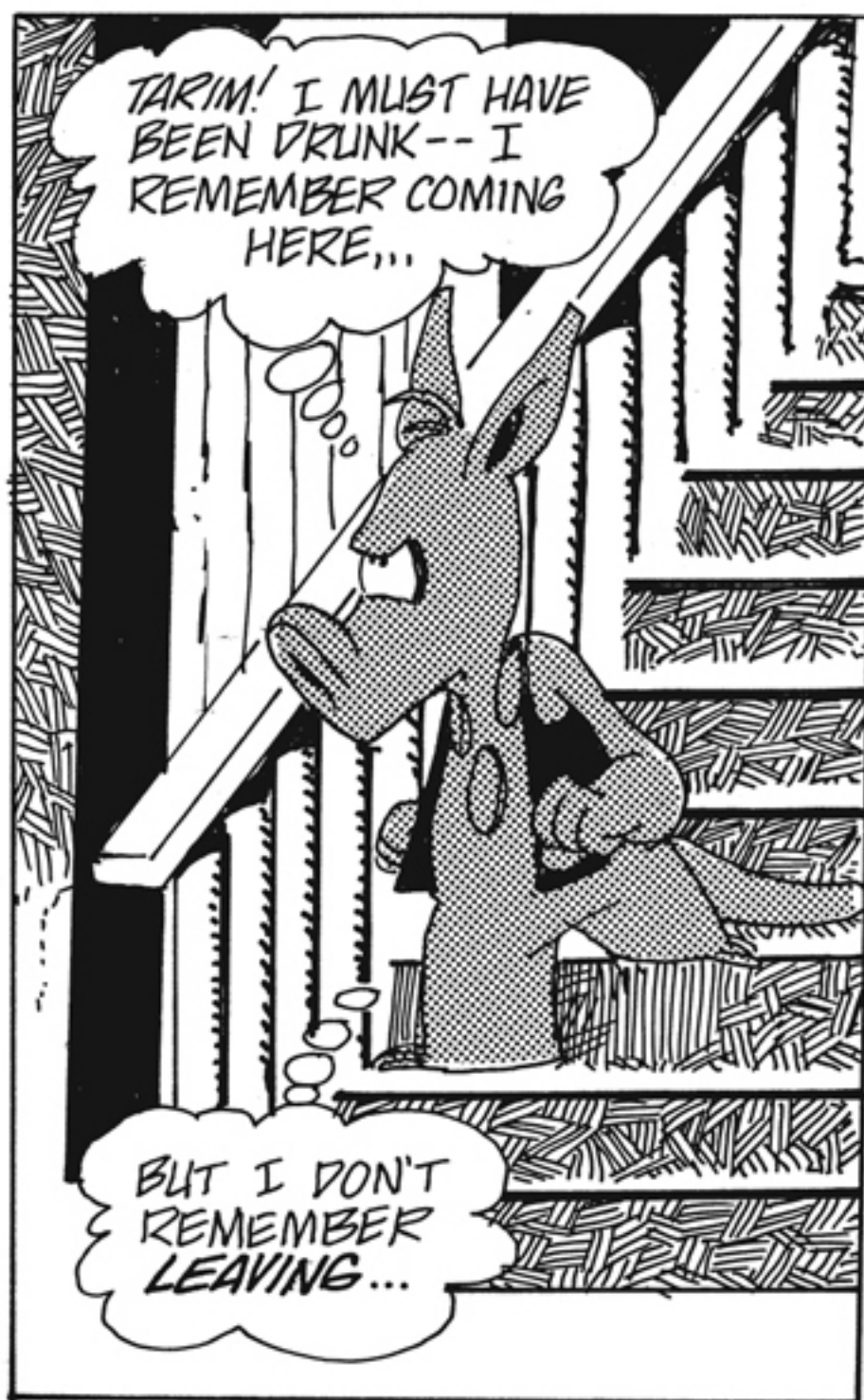
I FINALLY TRACKED YOU TO THIS...

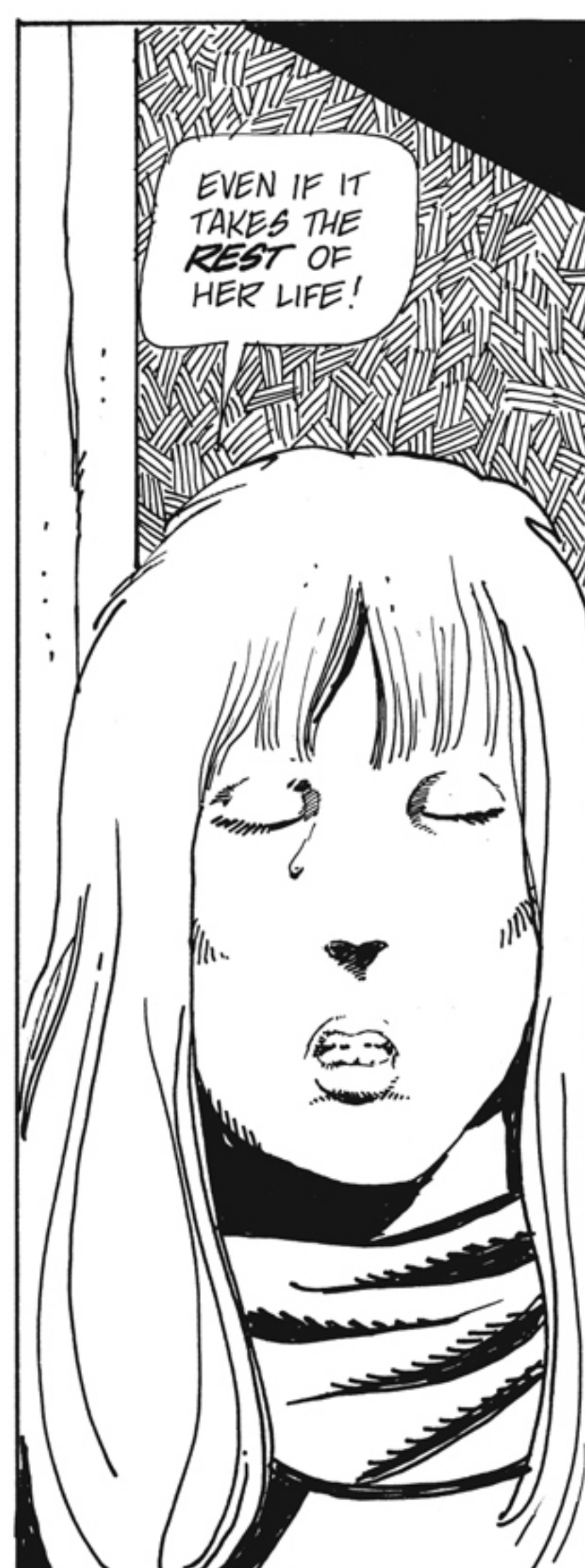
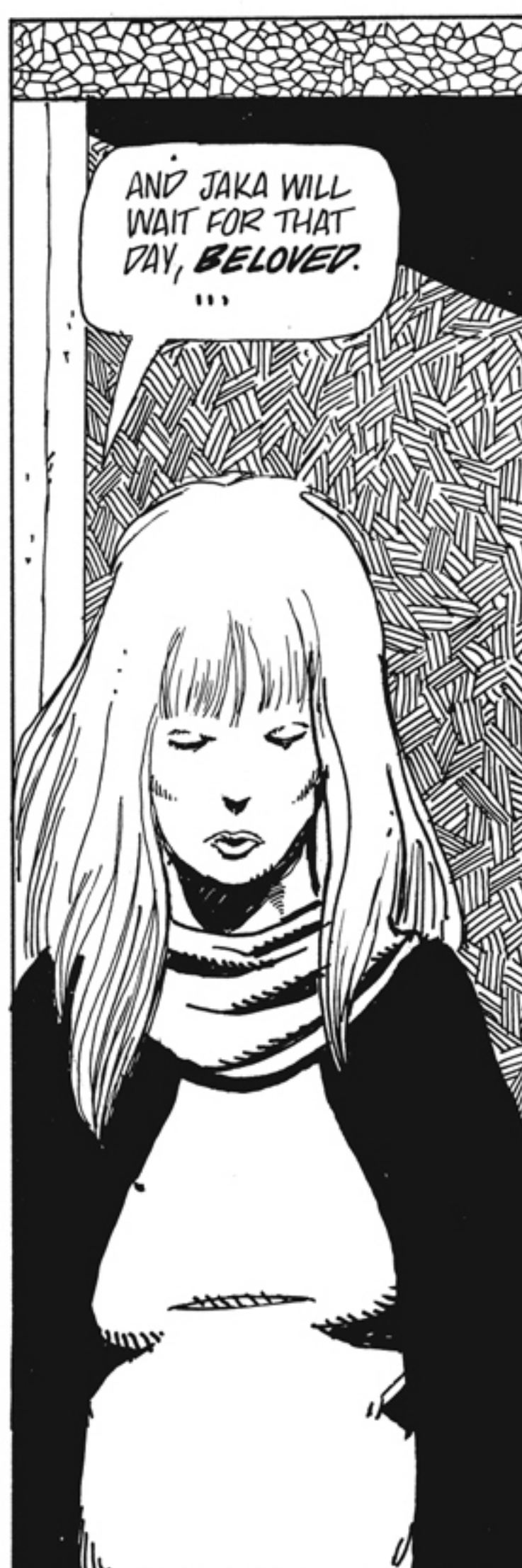
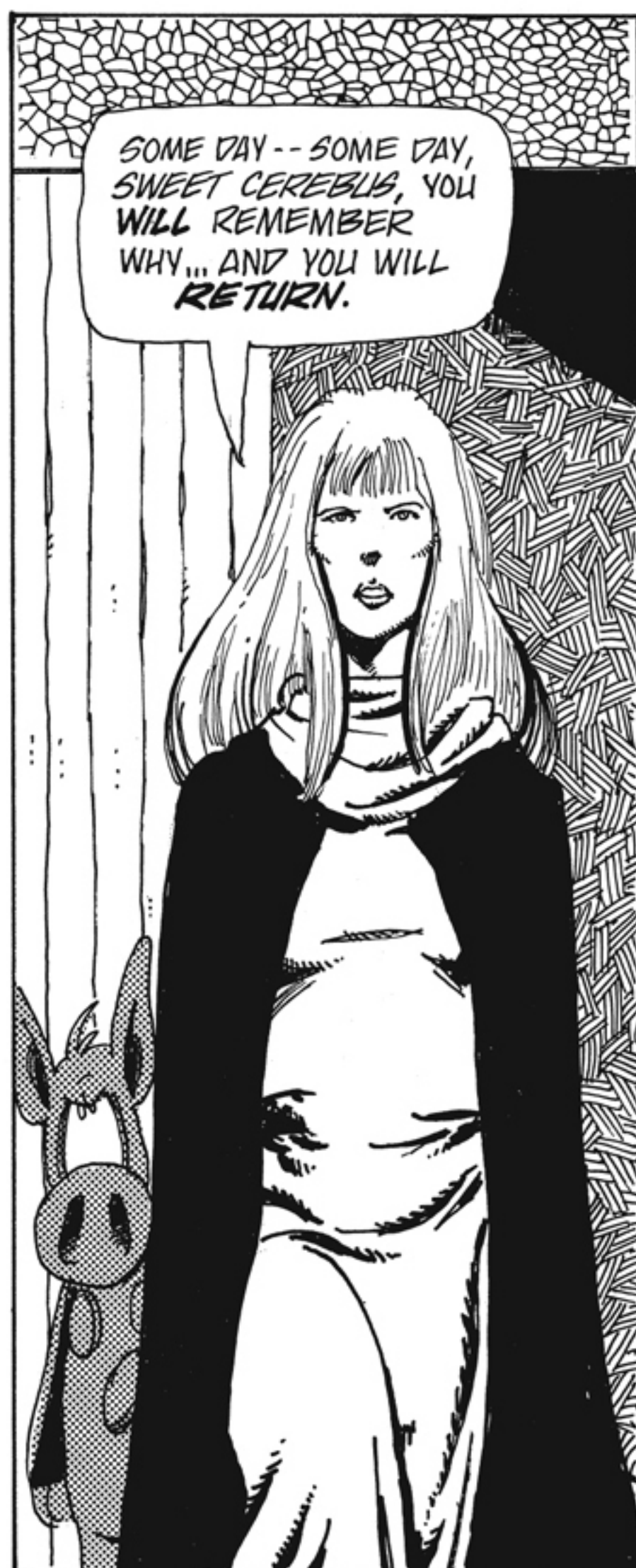


OH.

BEAT ME UP CAREFULLY, WOULD YOU?

I HAVEN'T BEEN WELL LATELY.





BLACK SUN RISING!

TARIM!

"IN THE HEART OF THE
HSIFAN KHANATE LIES
THE TEMPLE OF THE
BLACK SUN. LITTLE IS
KNOWN OF THE BLACK
SUN RELIGION, THOUGH IT
IS SAID THAT ANCIENT
RITUAL SACRIFICE IS
NOT UNKNOWN TO THE
BLACK SUN PRIESTS..."

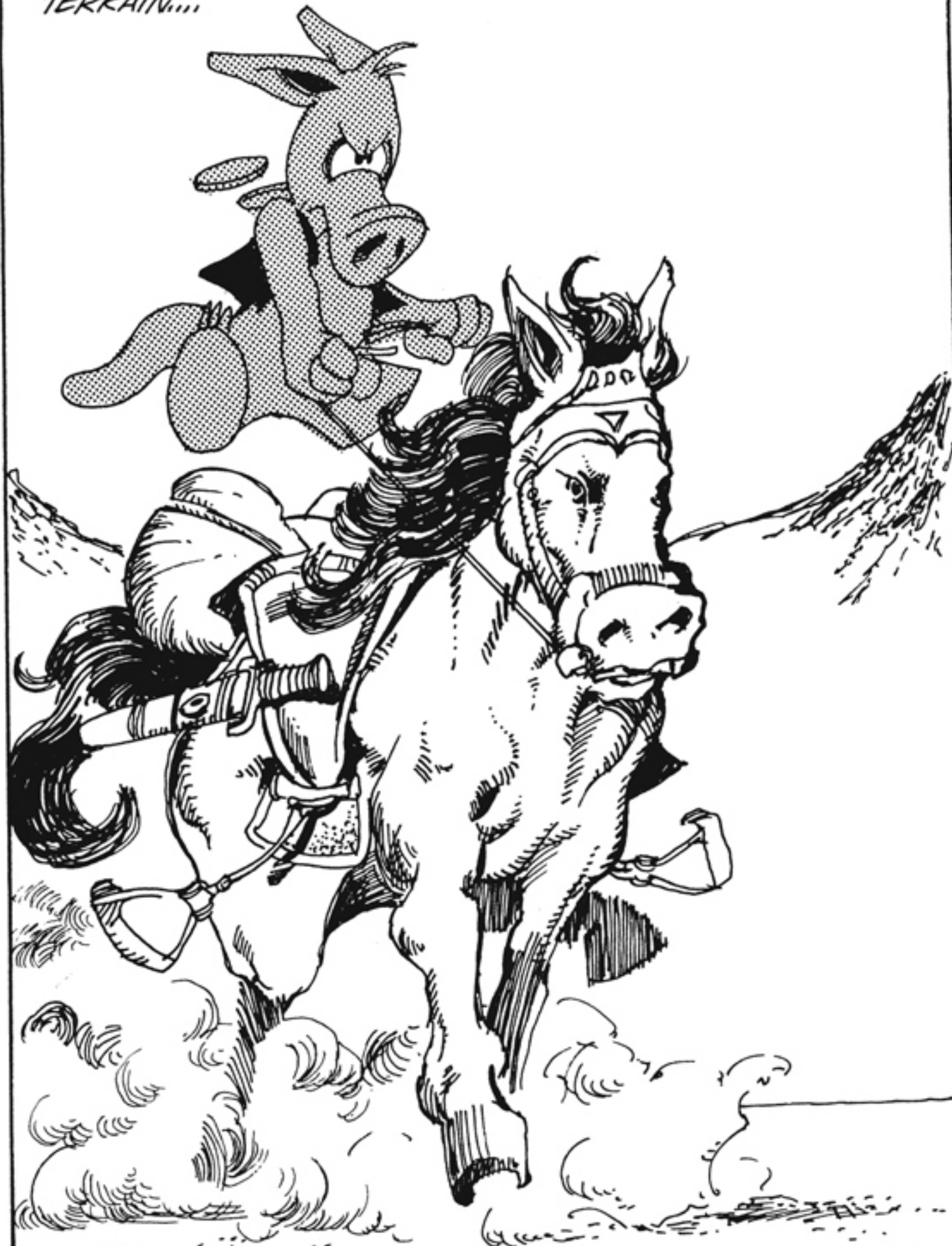
The Book of Stoth

SIM
78

IT WOULD
HAVE BEEN
EASIER TO
FOLLOW THE
LOWLANDS
TO THE SOUTH
AND SWING
BACK UP
NORTH...



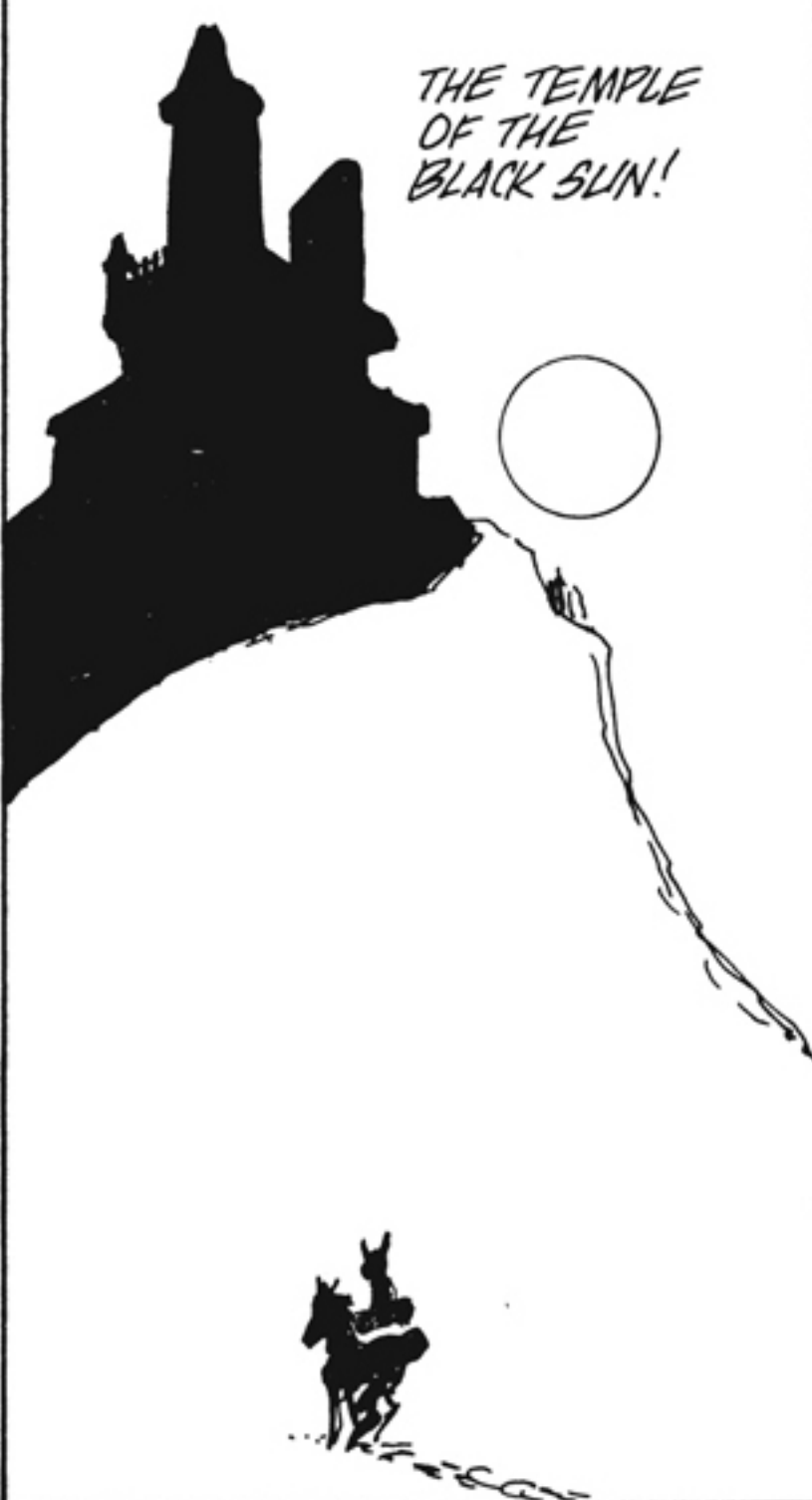
BUT CEREBUS IS A FOLLOWER OF THE "OLD WAYS", SO
HE HAS TAKEN THE DIRECT ROUTE THROUGH A
DOZEN MOUNTAIN PASSES AND ACROSS TREACHEROUS
TERRAIN...



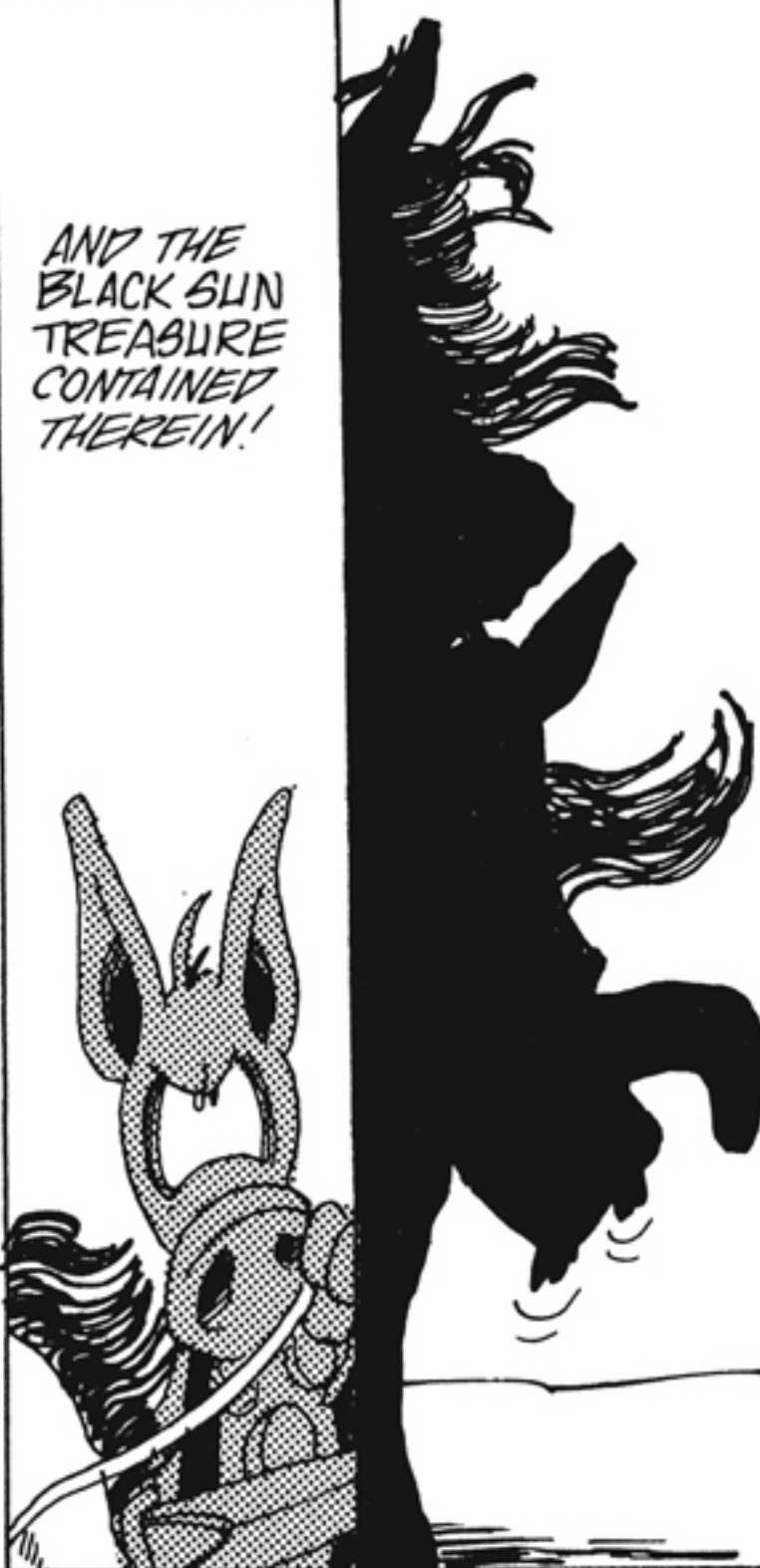
NOW, HE
IS WITHIN
SIGHT OF
HIS GOAL



THE TEMPLE
OF THE
BLACK SUN!

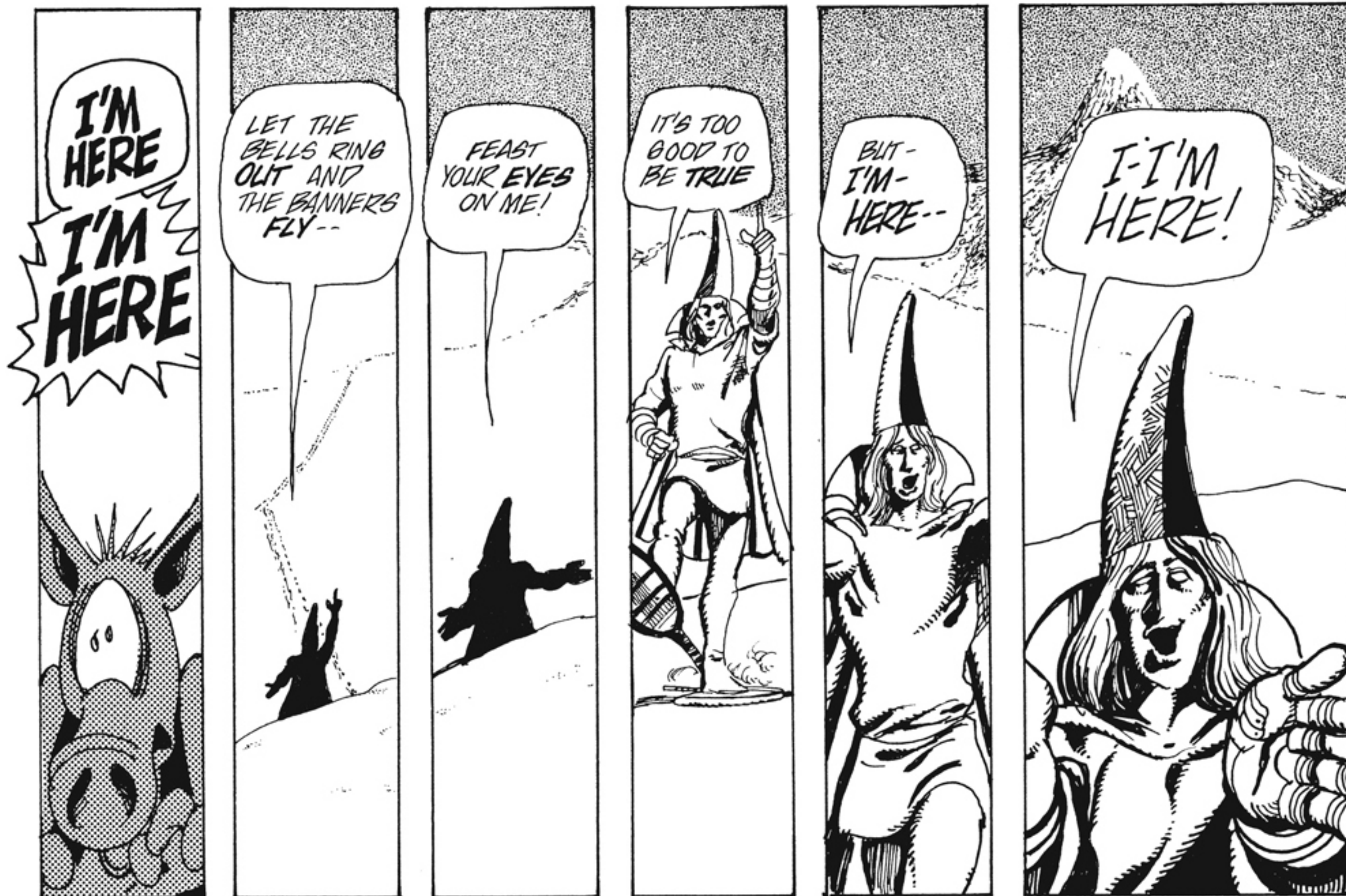


AND THE
BLACK SUN
TREASURE
CONTAINED
THEREIN!



THE EARLY WINTER WINDS
STING HIS EYES AS HE
DISMOUNTS! THE AIR IS
RICH WITH THE SMELL OF
SORCERY, SO THE EARTH-PIG
PAUSES TO TRY AND CATCH
ANY RANDOM SOUNDS



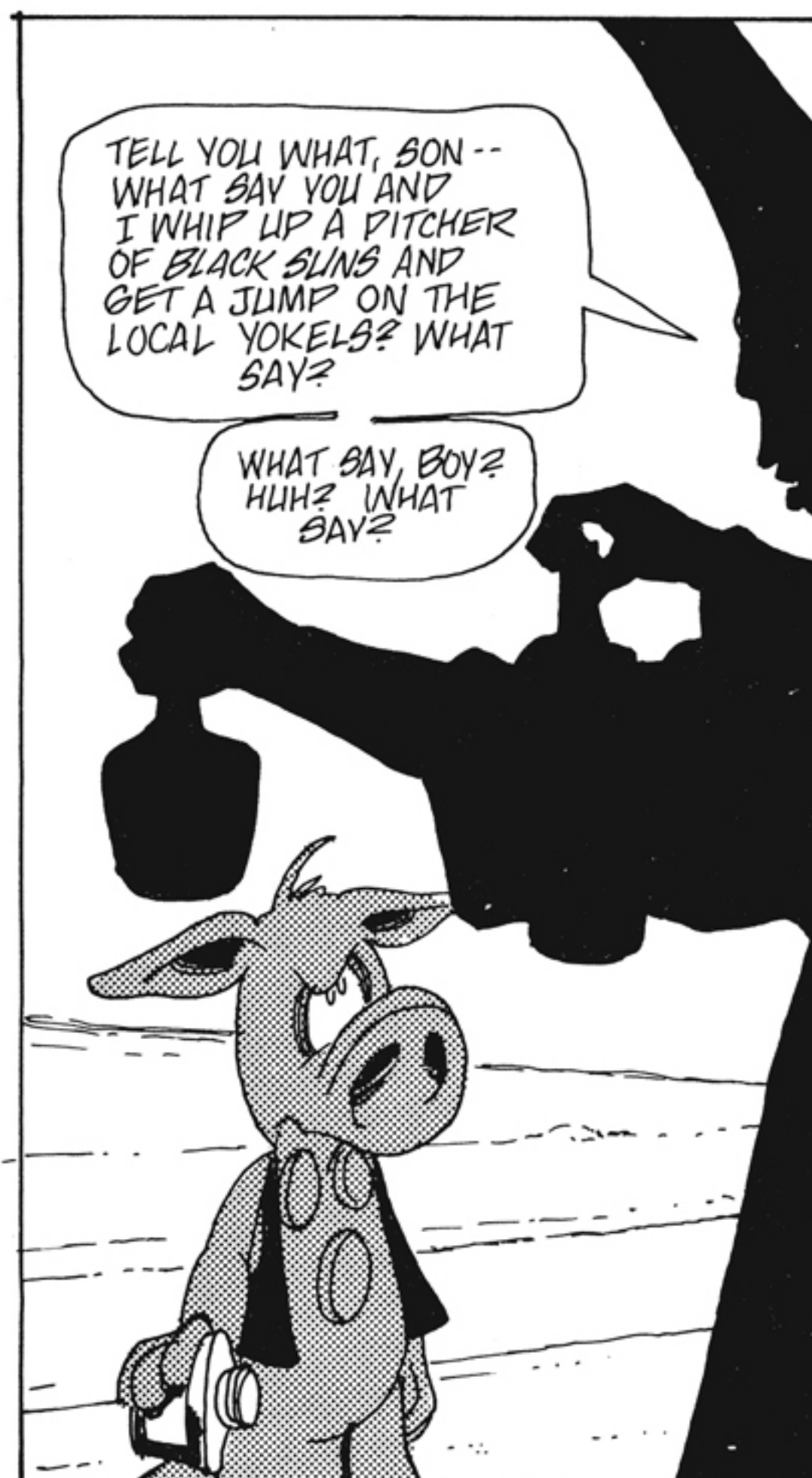




I JUST - I SAY - I
JUST **HAPPENED**
TO HEAR ABOUT
THIS HERE
"FESTIVAL OF
THE BLACK SUN"



AND IF THERE'S ANYTHING
OLD ELROD IS A **PUSHOVER**
FOR, IT'S A **BLACK SUN**
COCKTAIL... SO I BOUGHT
SOME DARK ALE, APRICOT
BRANDY AND BOREALAN
WHISKEY...



TELL YOU WHAT, SON --
WHAT SAY YOU AND
I WHIP UP A PITCHER
OF **BLACK SUNS** AND
GET A JUMP ON THE
LOCAL YOKELS? WHAT
SAY?

WHAT SAY, BOY?
HUH? WHAT
SAY?



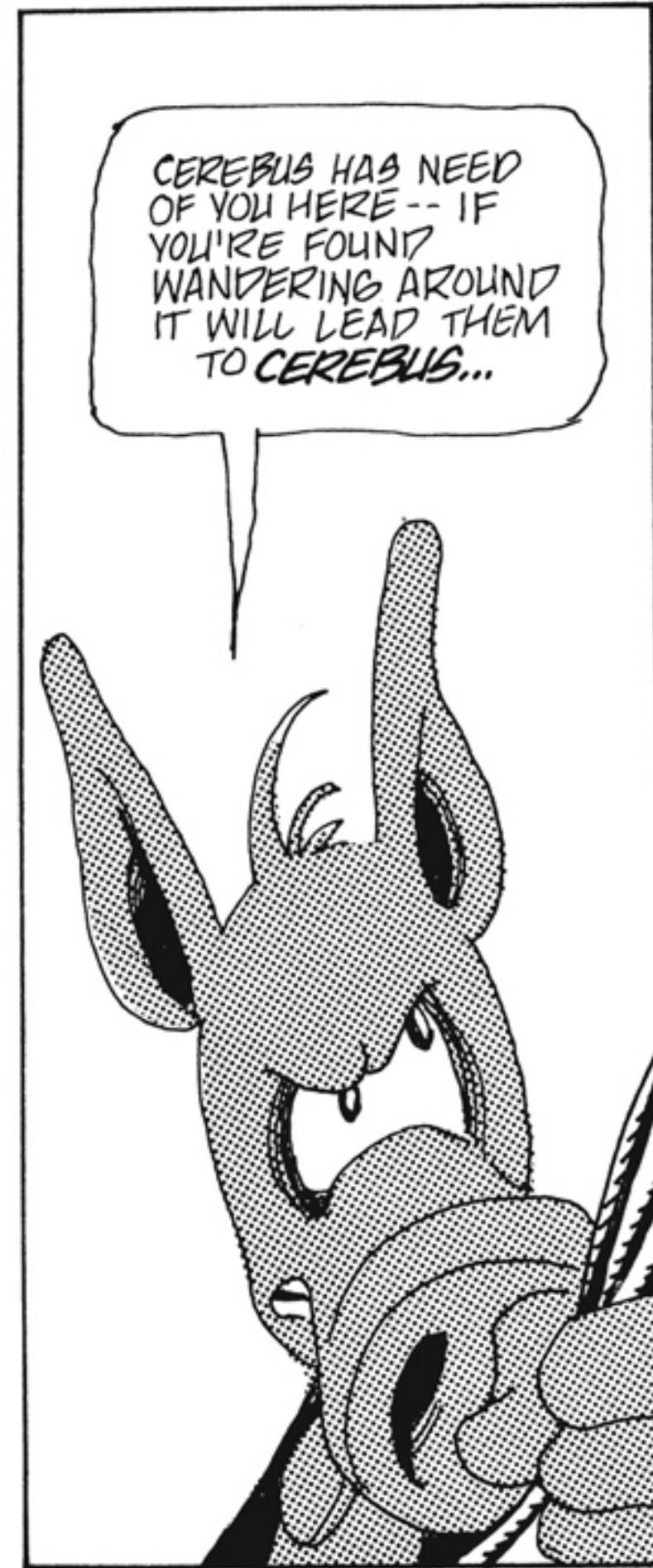
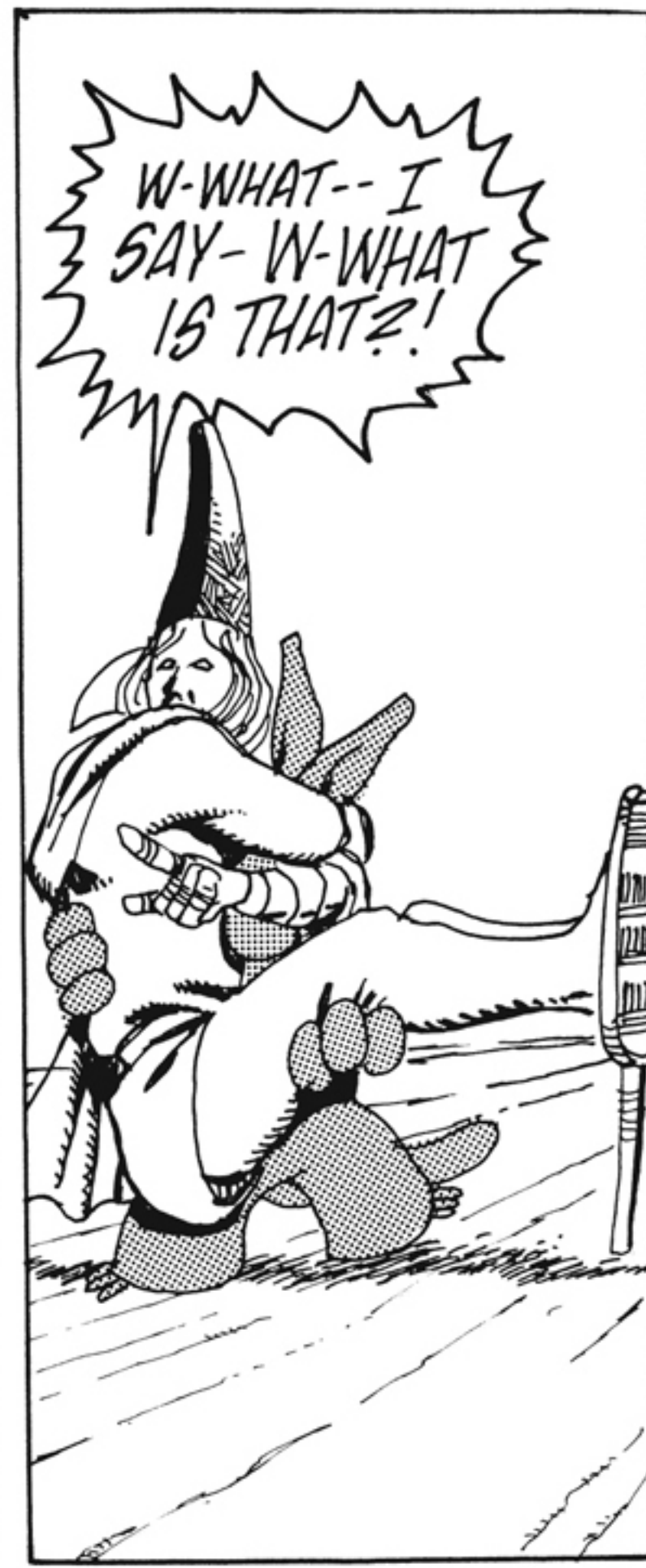
LISTEN TO ME, YOU
WHITE-SKINNED,
RED-EYED **MORON!**
THE **BLACK SUN** IS
A CULT OF DEATH
WORSHIPPERS...

THE CELEBRATION OF THEIR
RITES IS A **SECRET!** IF THEY
FIND OUT WE'RE HERE THEY
WILL **KILL** US! THEY ARE
COMPLETELY RUTHLESS-- DO
YOU UNDERSTAND? **RUTHLESS!**

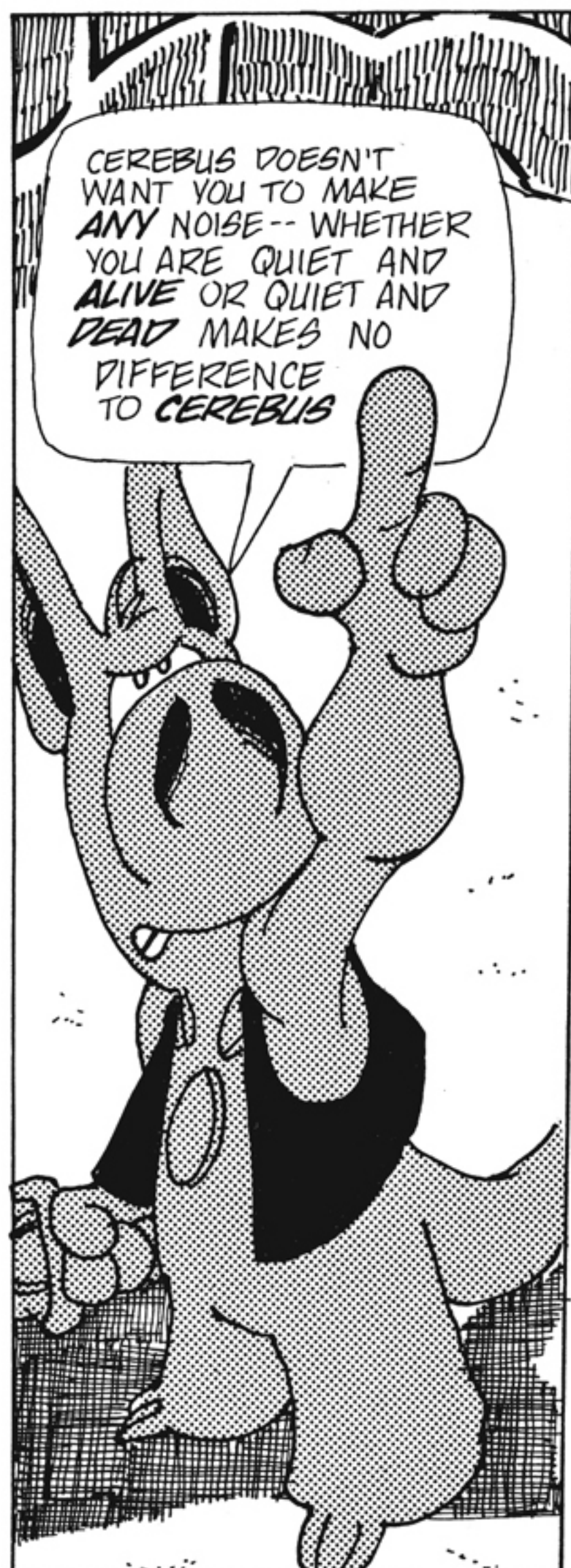


HEH-
HEH-
HEH!

HEH-
HEH-
HEH?







WITHIN THE PIT, IT
WATCHES AND WAITS,
WITH A PATIENCE
BORN OF CENTURIES
THE TIME IS AT HAND
AND ALREADY ITS
VERY MOLECULES
HUM WITH
ANTICIPATION...

...OF THE COMING **SACRIFICES**.
THOUGH MISSHAPEN, IT IS
SENTIENT...

...AND SO, COMMENCES
TO TRILL AN ANCIENT
SONG OF **TRIUMPH!**

I'VE NEVER--I SAY
NEVER SEEN
SUCH POOR
RELIGIOUS
FANATICS....

I MUST HAVE WALKED
HALFWAY TO THE RED
MARCHES AND I STILL
HAVEN'T FOUND SO
MUCH AS A MISPLACED
GOLD FILLING!



HE HAD READ COUNTLESS ANCIENT "TOMES OF THE BLACK SUN." FINALLY HE HAD FOUND THE OBSCURE DEITY HE NEEDED...



A FIGURE FROM HIS RELIGION'S DISTANT PAST-- ONE OF THE REVERED NAMELESS ONES...



THE COSTUME HE MADE WAS FAITHFUL TO ALL KNOWN DESCRIPTIONS OF THE DEITY...

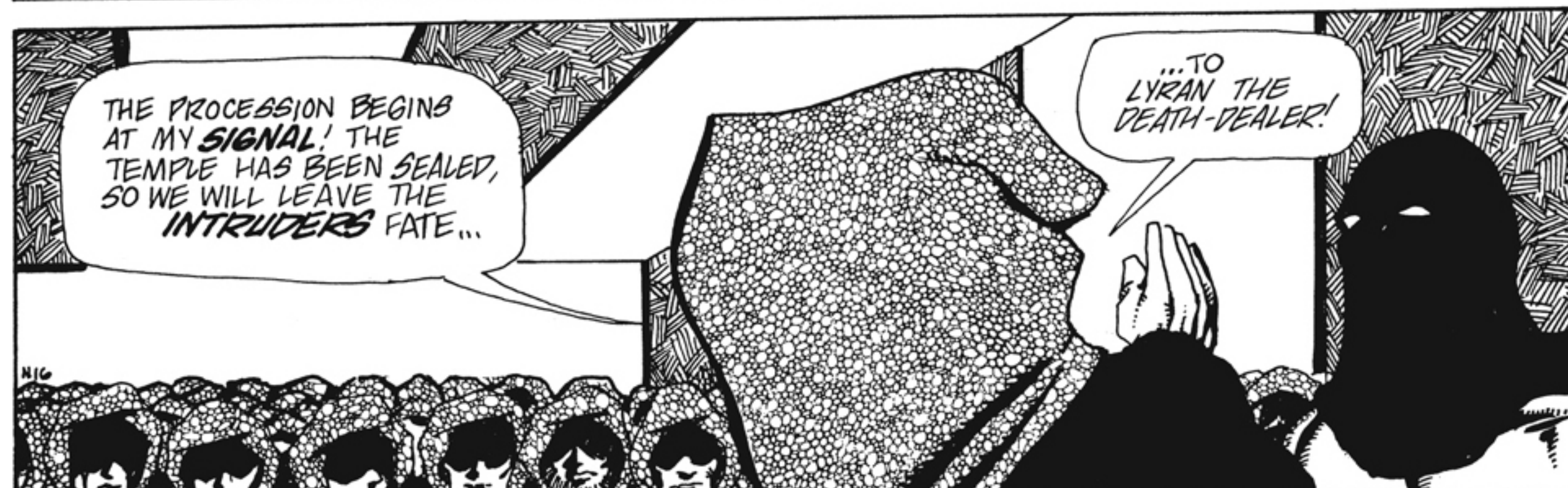
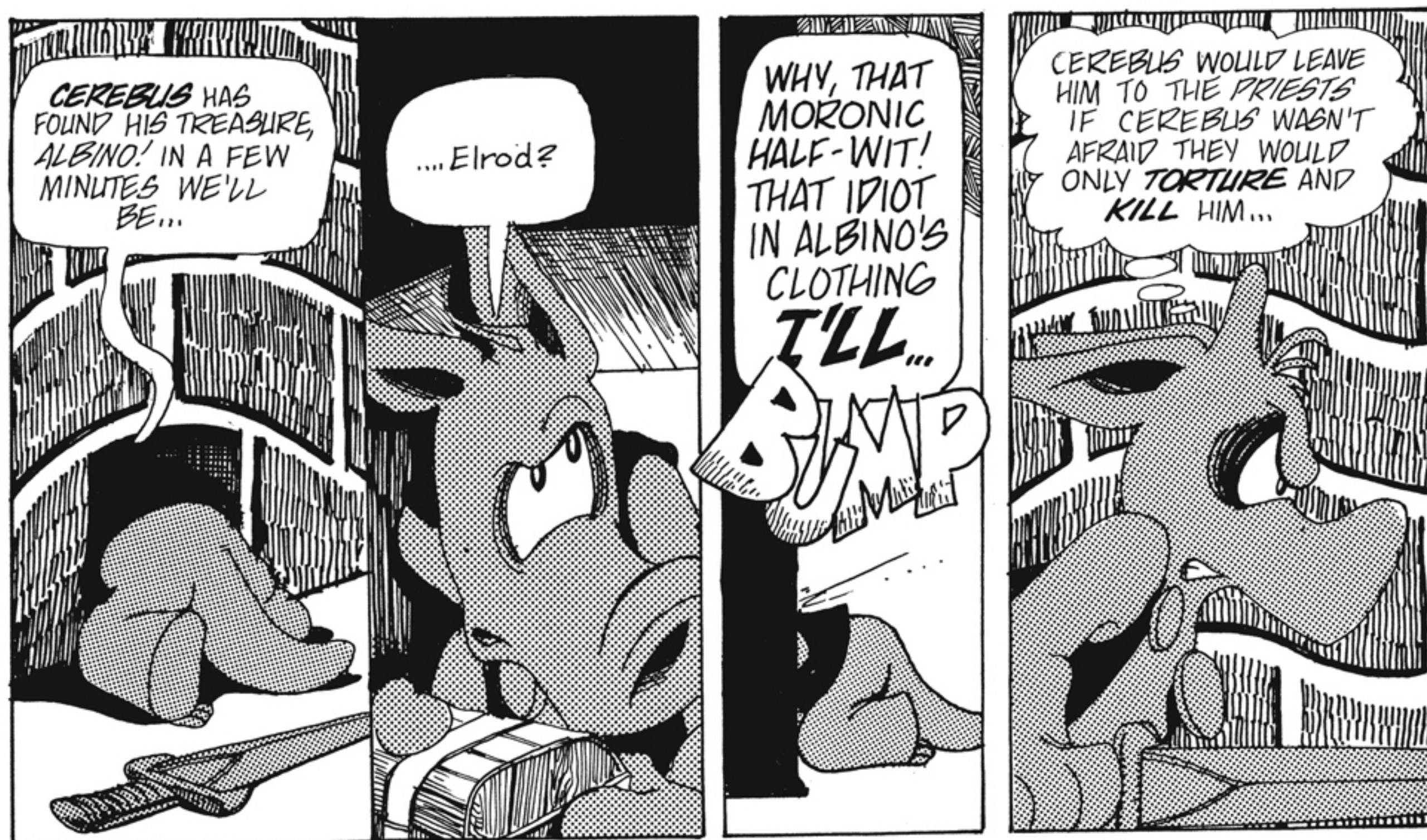
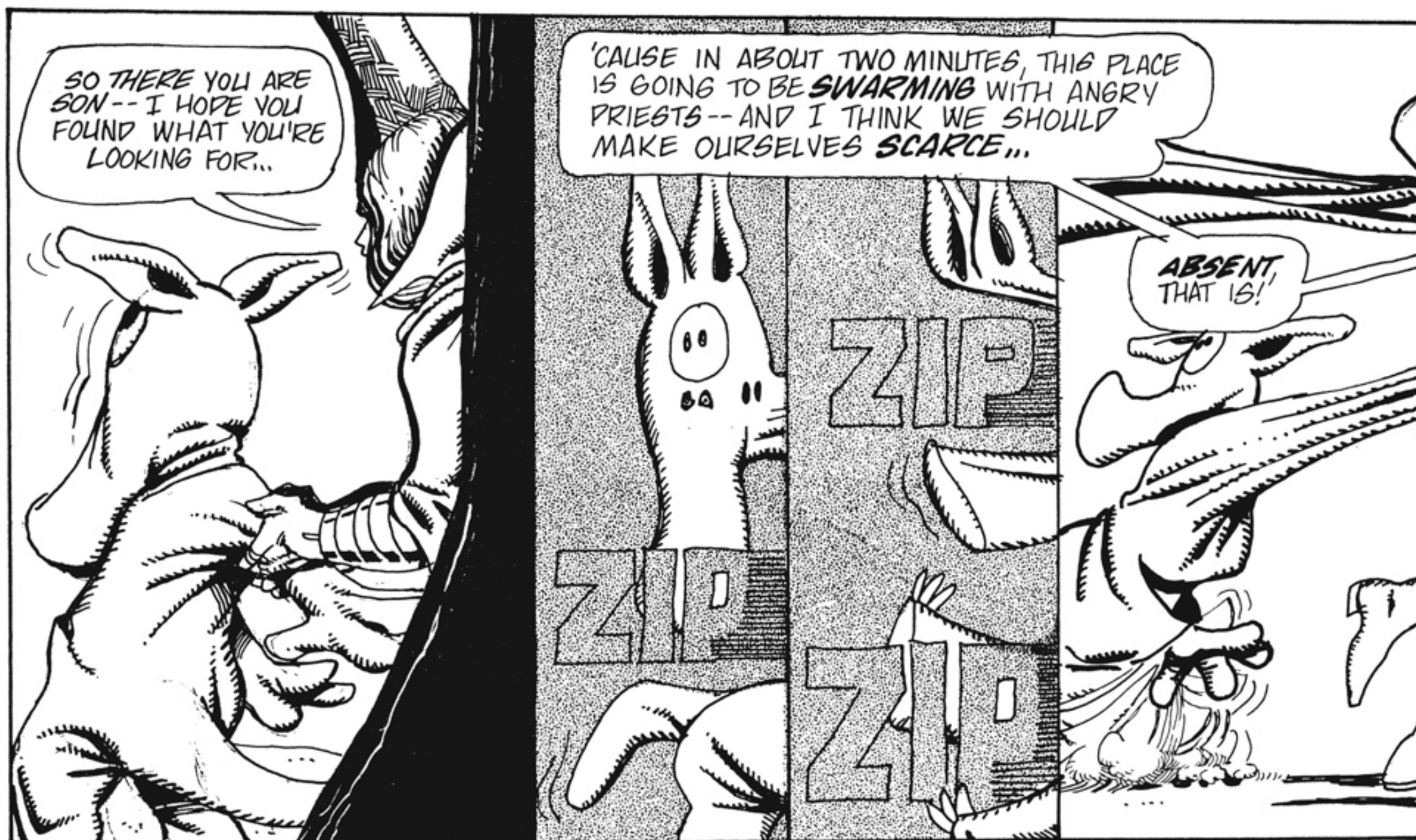


WHEN HE APPEARED THIS EVENING BEFORE THE ASSEMBLED BROTHERS QUOTING ANCIENT PROPHECIES, HE WOULD BE HAILED AS A NEW GOD...

THEN HE WOULD NO LONGER BE MIT, THE FOUR FOOT PRIEST-- MIT THE FEEBLE! NO-- THEN HE WOULD BE...

THE NAMELESS GOD OF THE BLACK SUN...!







YOU ARE, WITHOUT DOUBT, THE STRANGEST KID I'VE EVER MET, SON!

I LEAVE YOU ALONE FOR TEN -- I SAY TEN MINUTES AND Y'ALL GET WASTED AWAY TO SKIN AND BONES...



NOT TO MENTION THAT YOU FOUND TIME TO DYE YOUR BUNNY SUIT **WHITE**!

SPEAK UP SON -- YOU SOUND LIKE YOU'RE TALKING THROUGH AN INCH-THICK PIECE OF BURLAP!



AGITATE YOUR LEGS, BOY -- IF THOSE **PRIESTS** CATCH US, WE HAVEN'T GOT A PRAYER!

THAT'S A **JOKE** SON! GET IT? **PRIESTS?** PRAYER?

OH, NEVER MIND!



I KEEP THROWIN' 'EM SON AND YOU KEEP MISSIN' 'EM!

NICE BOY, BUT HE'S ABOUT AS MUCH FUN AS A **TOOTHACHE**!

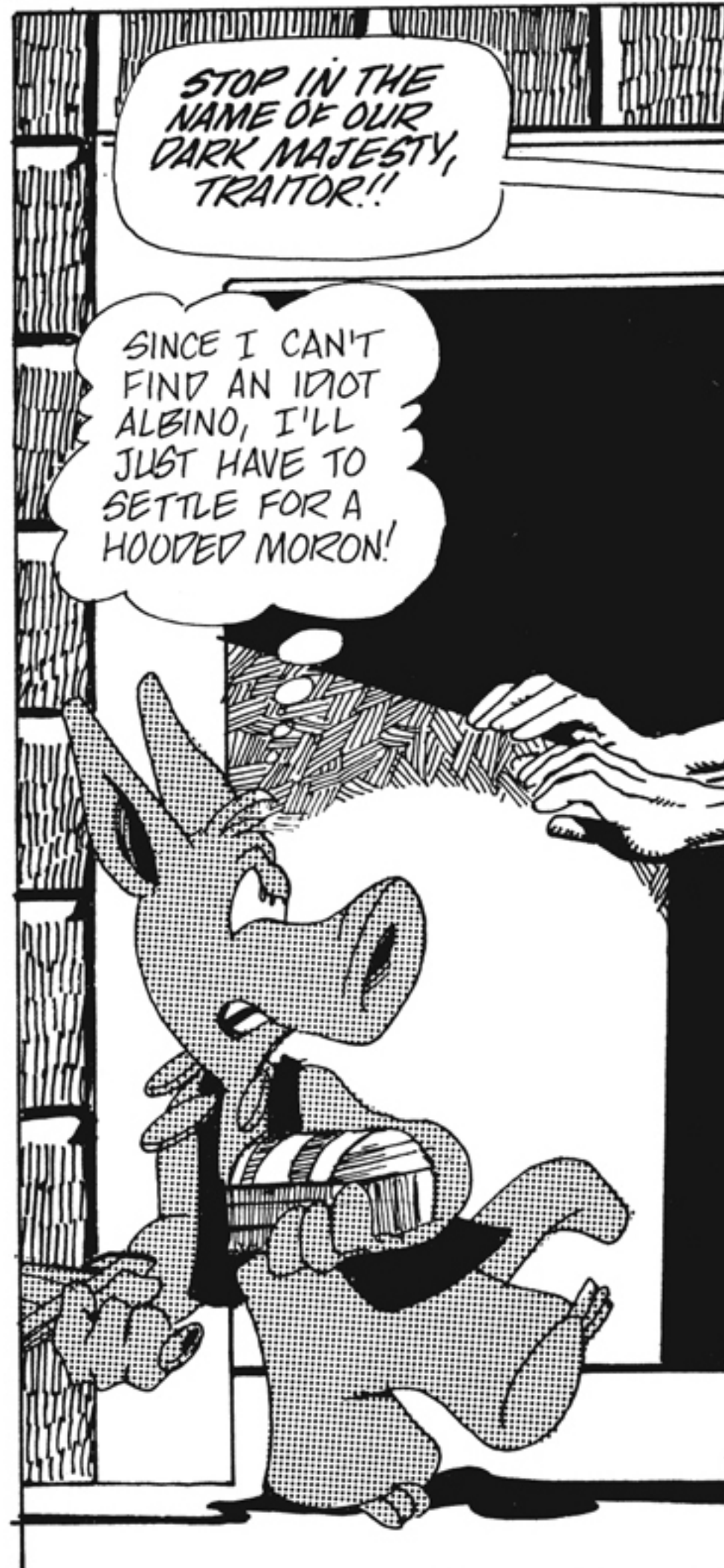
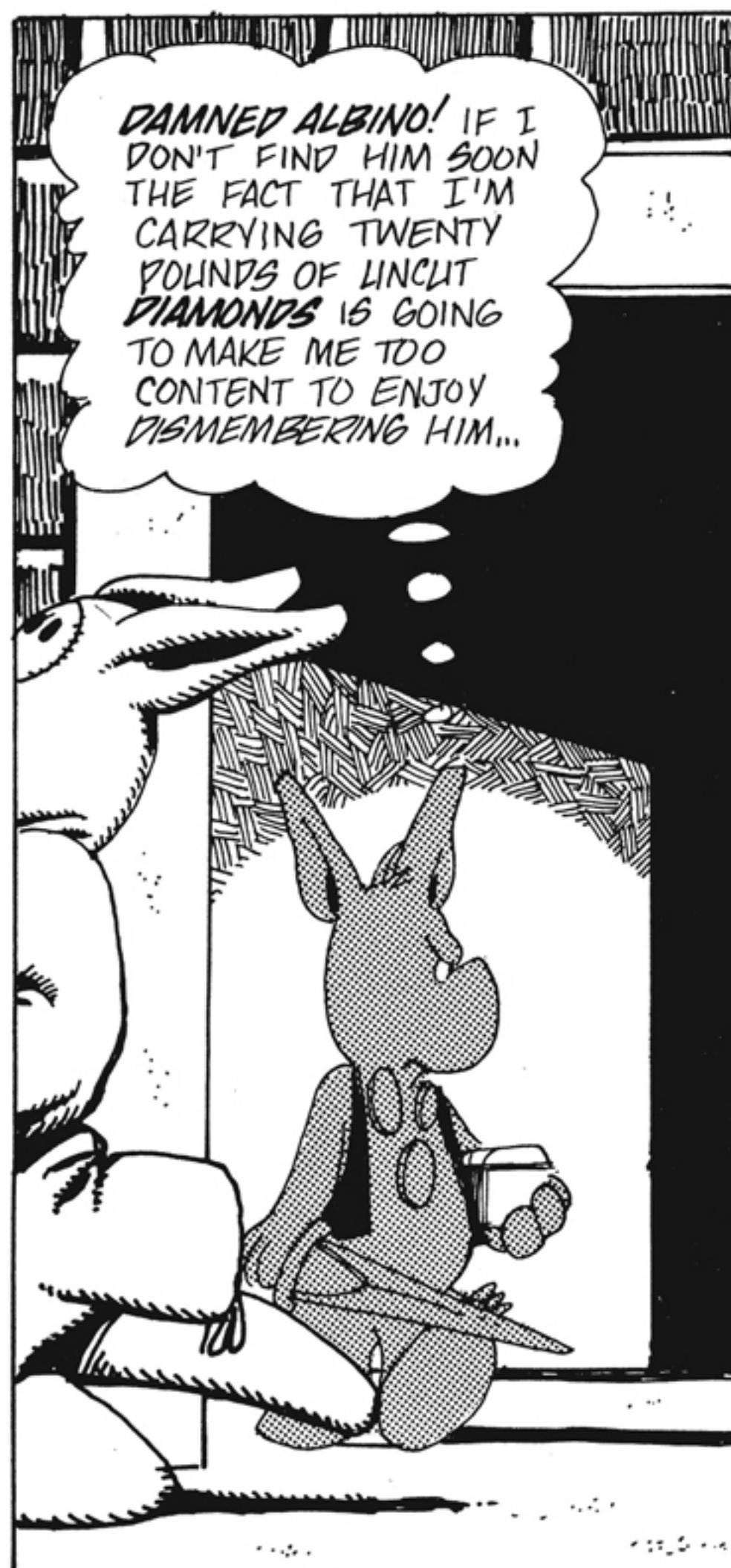
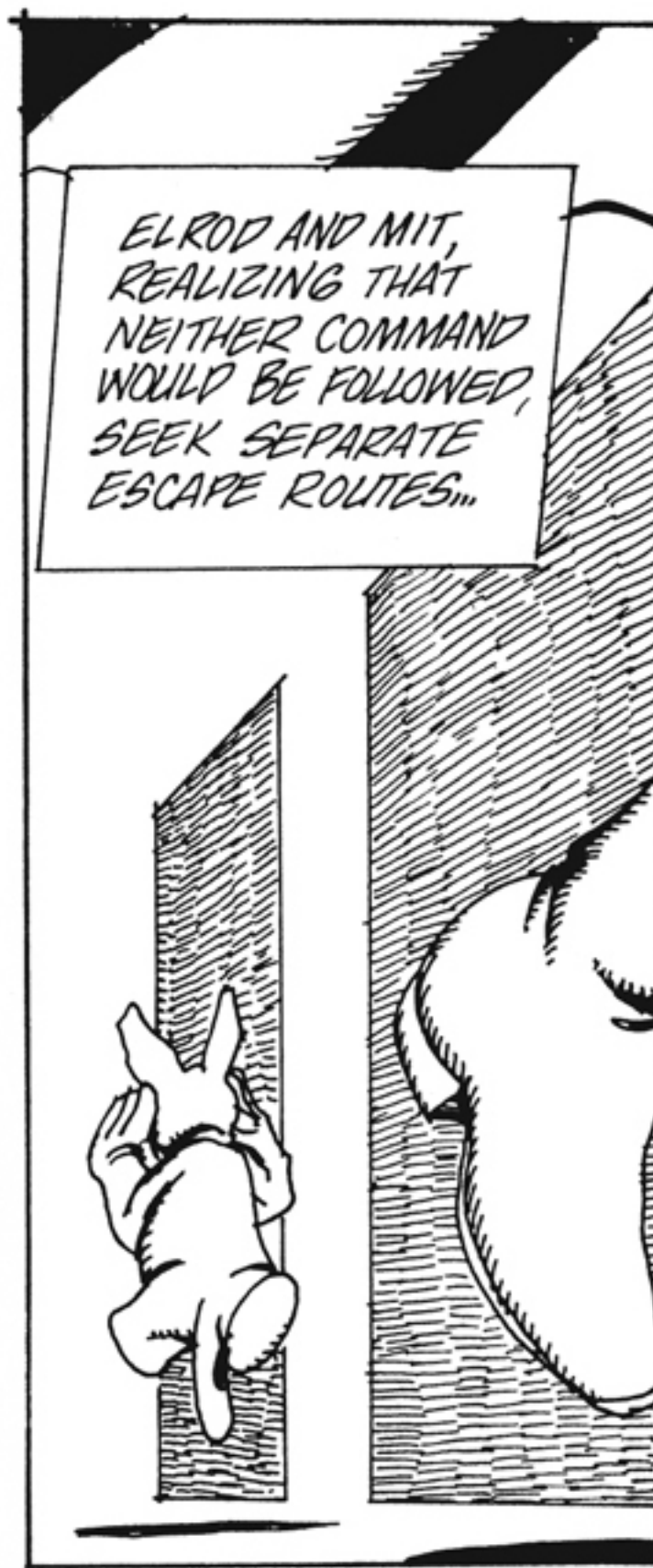


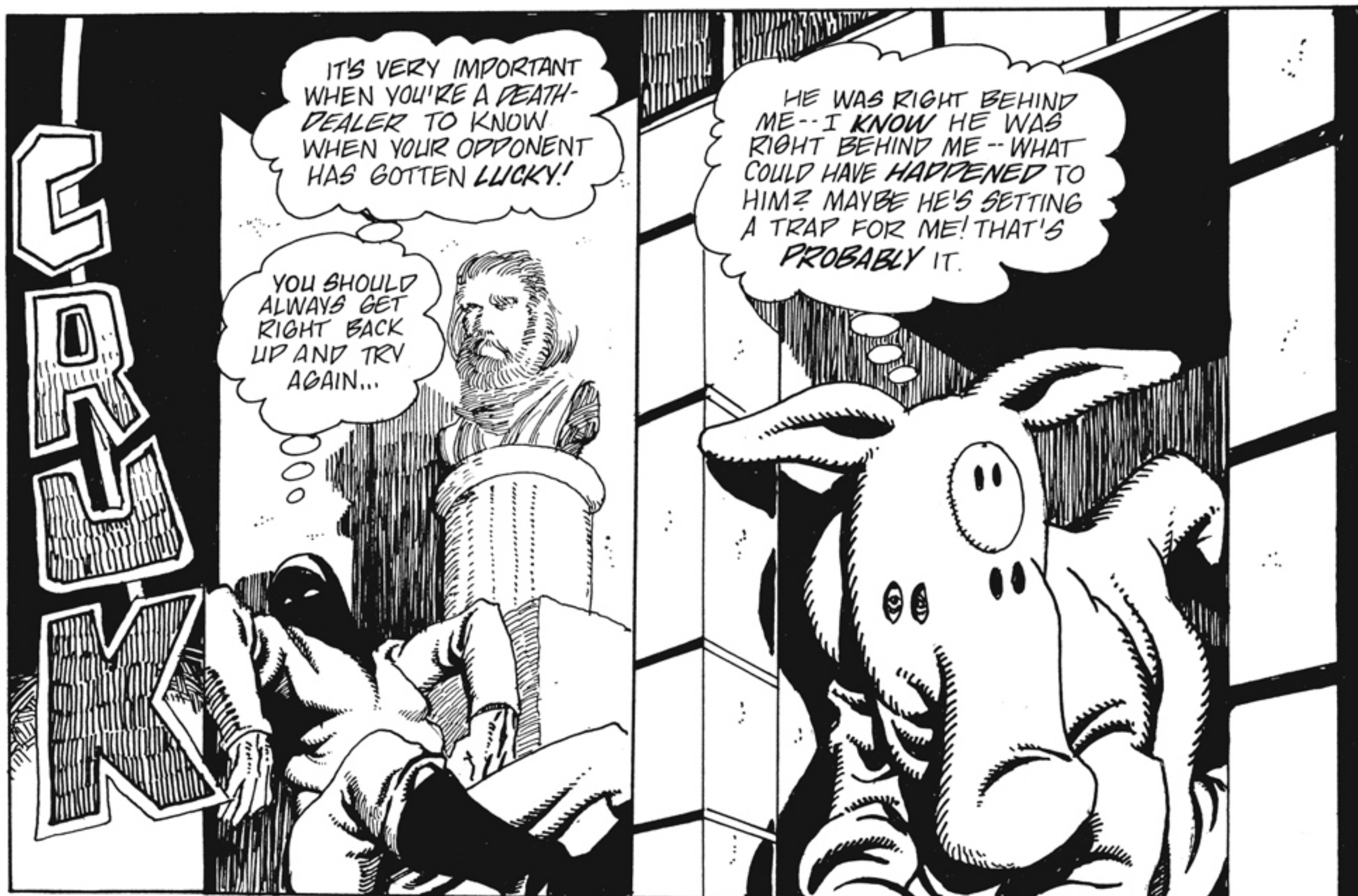
HOLD ON, SON -- WE'VE -- I SAY -- WE'VE RUN ACROSS ENOUGH **BLACK ROBES** TO MAKE A SHROUD FOR **BOREALA**...

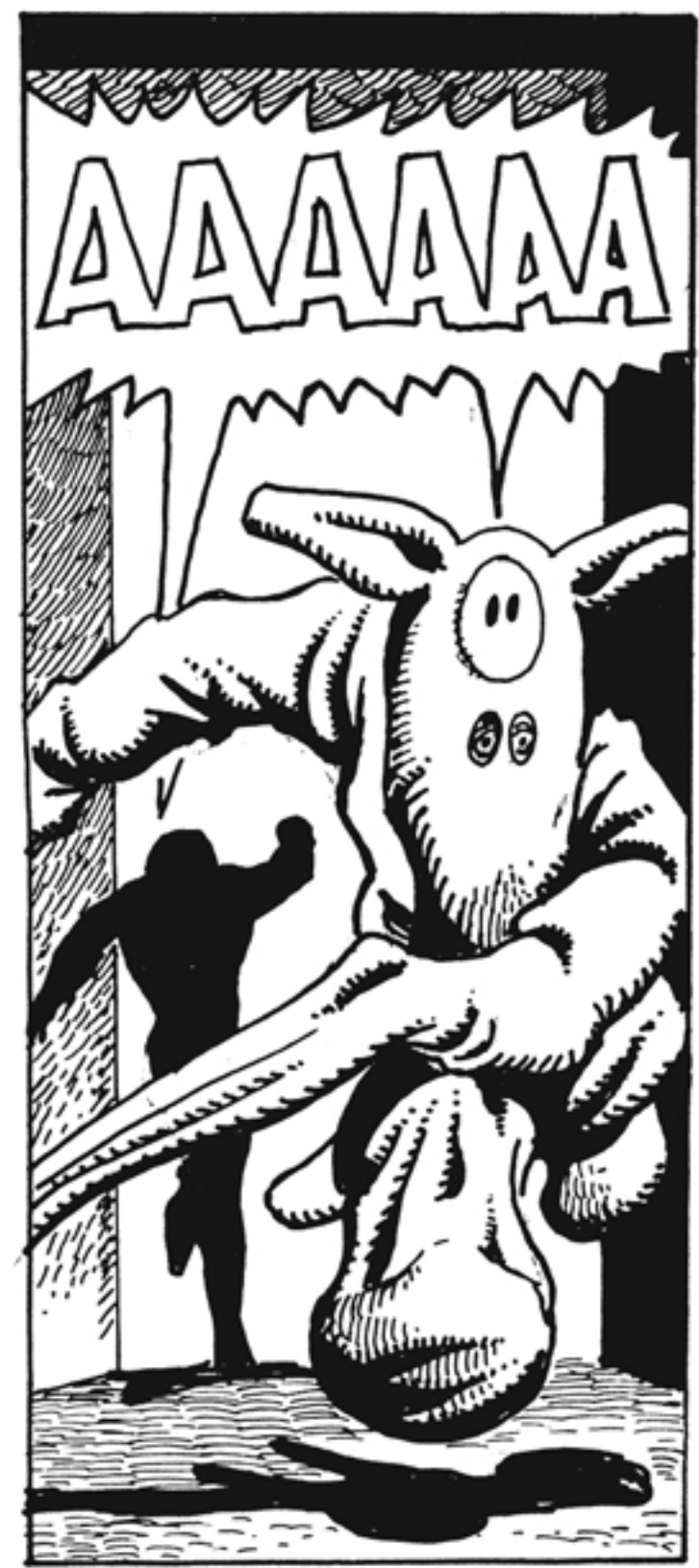
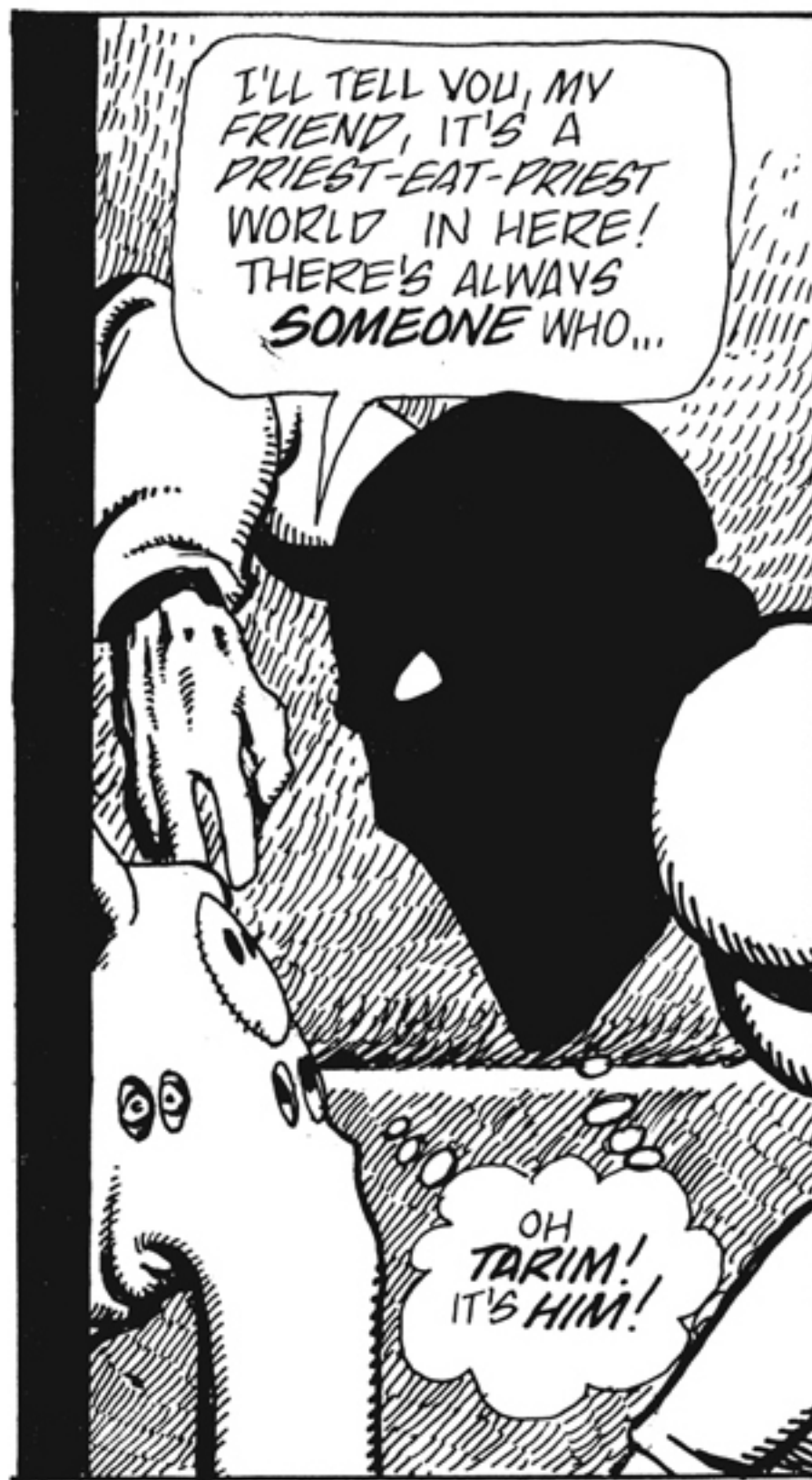
NOW JUST KEEP QUIET AND WE



AS ONE OF THE **ANCIENT NAMELESS ONES**, I COMMAND YOU TO SEIZE THIS **INFIDEL**!









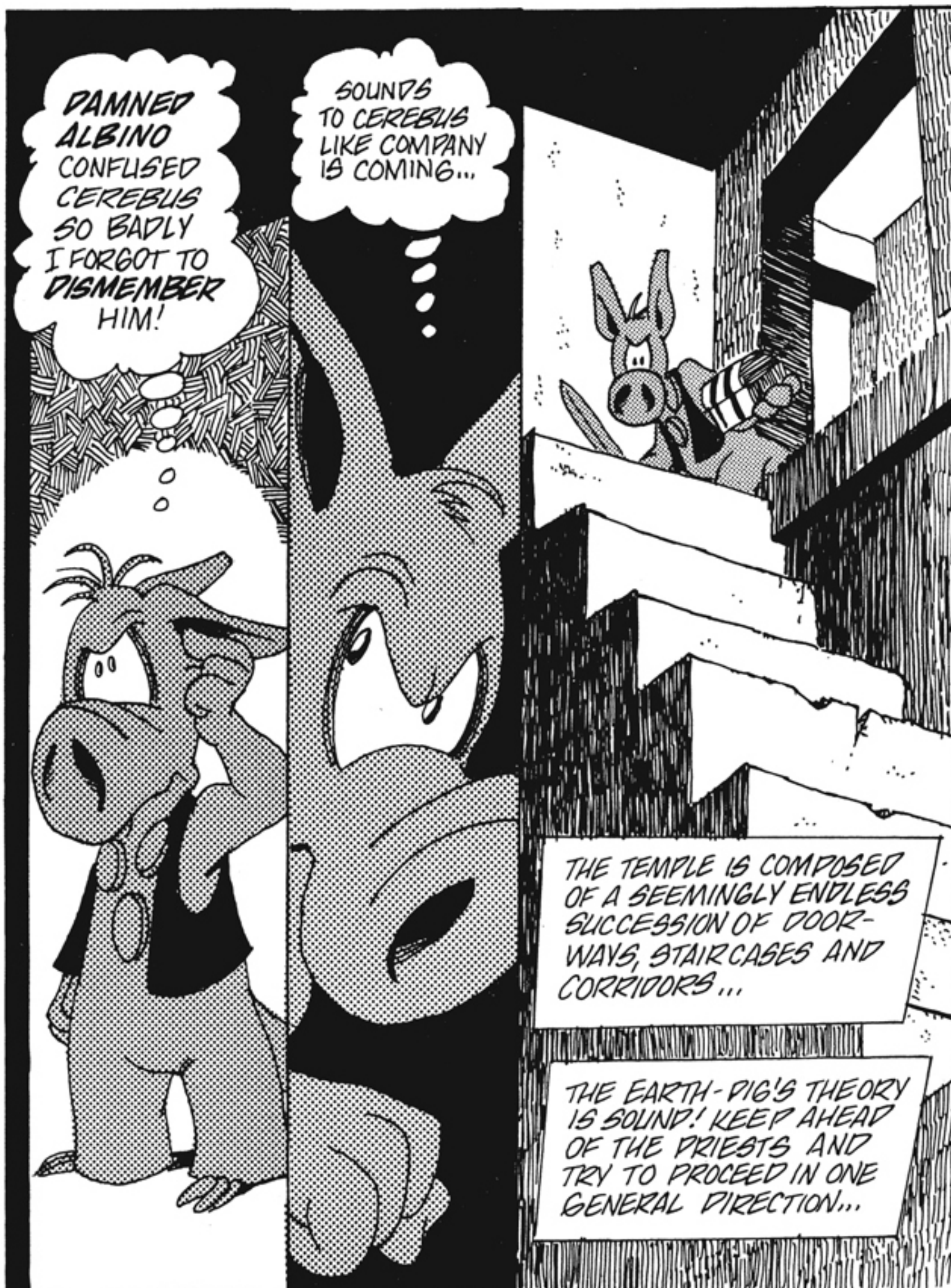
ARE YOU COMING OR NOT, **ALBINO**? CEREBUS PLANS TO LEAVE BEFORE THE **PRIESTS**...



...PRIESTS?



OH NO! YOU ALL GOT ME WITH THAT ONE LAST TIME! NOT AGAIN! **NOSIREEE!** I'D TRUST YOU ABOUT AS FAR AS I COULD THROW YOU...!



DAMNED ALBINO CONFUSED CEREBUS SO BADLY I FORGOT TO **DISMEMBER** HIM!

SOUNDS TO CEREBUS LIKE COMPANY IS COMING...

THE TEMPLE IS COMPOSED OF A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SUCCESSION OF DOORWAYS, STAIRCASES AND CORRIDORS...

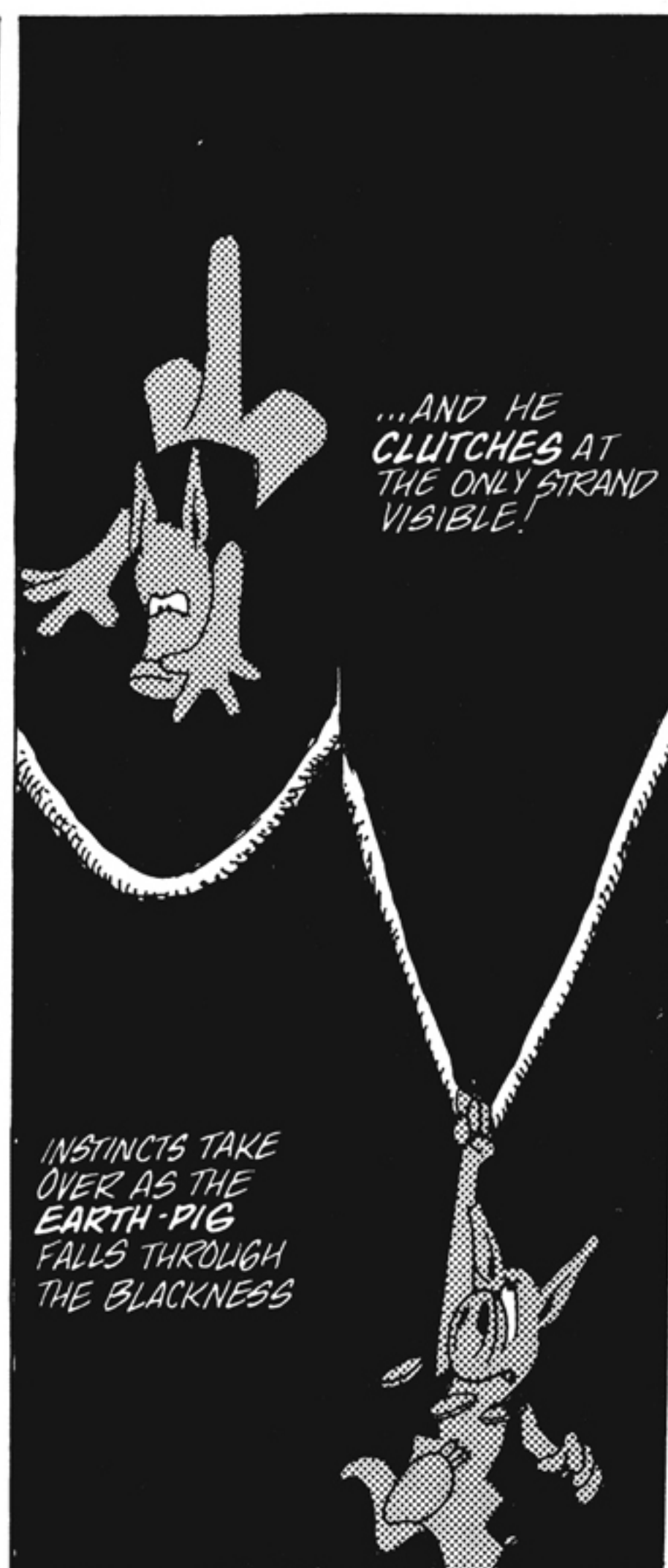
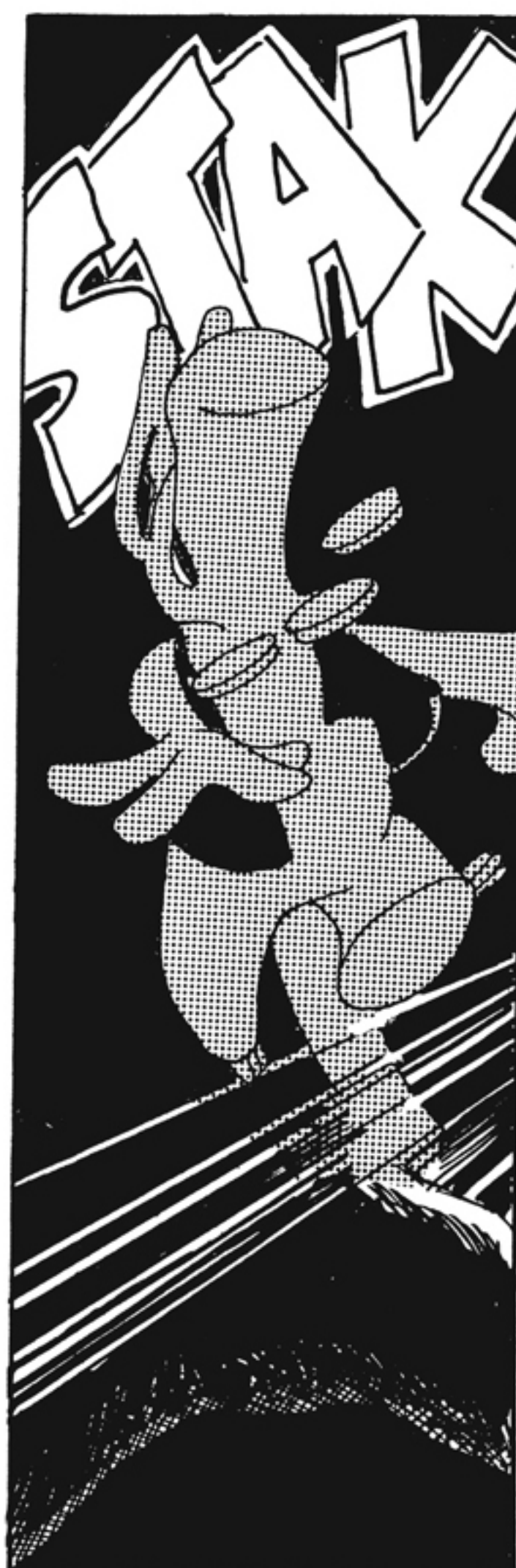
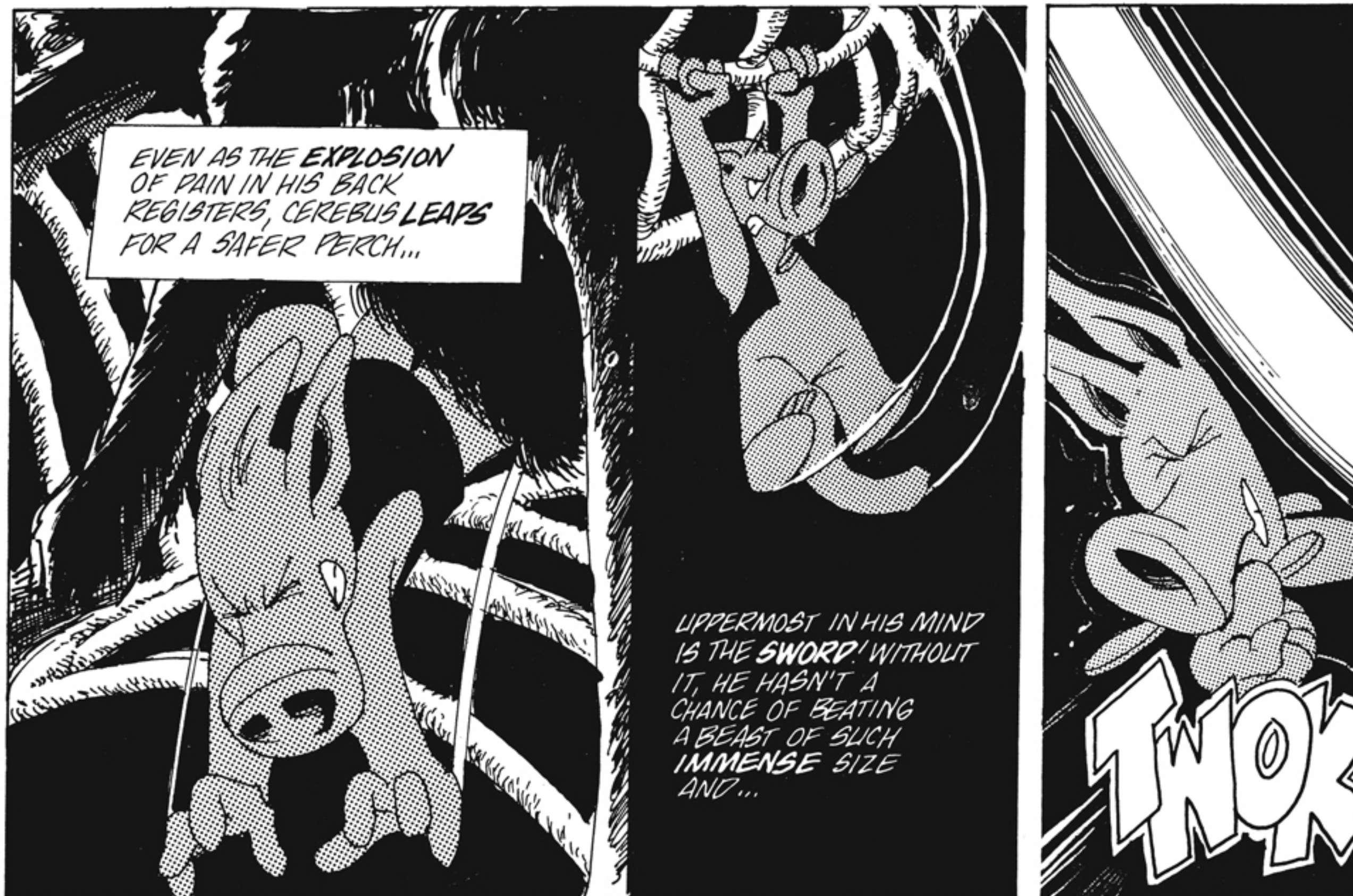
THE EARTH-PIG'S THEORY IS SOUND! KEEP AHEAD OF THE PRIESTS AND TRY TO PROCEED IN ONE GENERAL DIRECTION...



BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU REACH THE BOTTOM OF ONE THOSE STAIRCASES, PASS THROUGH ONE OF THOSE DOORWAYS AND FIND YOURSELF FACED WITH A GAPIING PIT?

A GAPIING PIT FROM WHICH ISSUES AN ODDLY **DISTURBING** TRILLING SOUND...







AARDVARKIAN MUSCLES
TENSE AS HE GRIPS
THE STRAND, BRACING
AGAINST IT...

HE WAITS UNTIL THE
BEAST IS ALMOST
UPON HIM...

AND THEN
SWINGS IN A
TIGHT CIRCLE...

...LAUNCHING
HIMSELF ACROSS
THE GAP -- ARMS
OUTSTRETCHED
AND SEEKING A
FIRM HANDHOLD
ON THE BEAST!

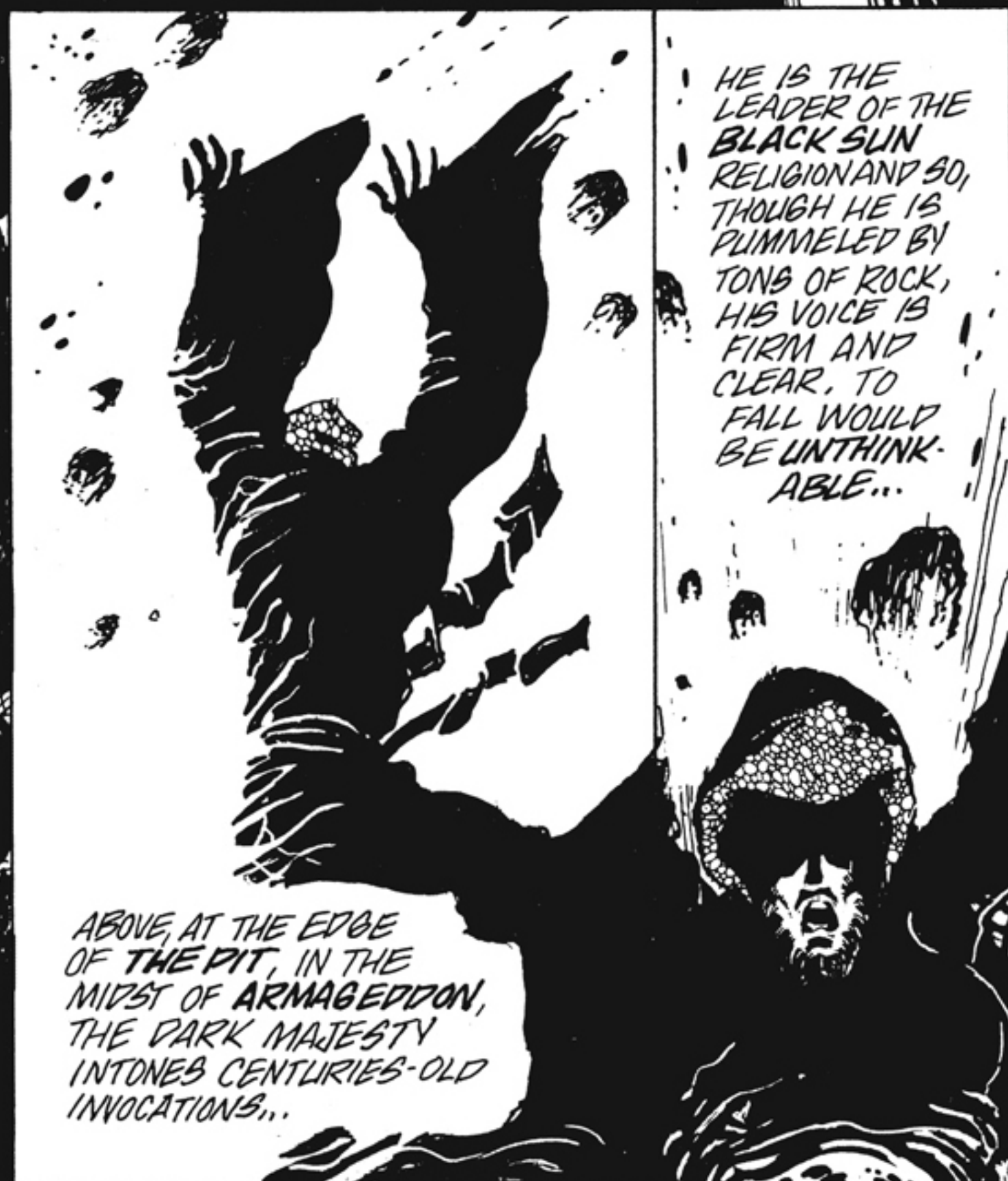
BUT THERE IS
NO HANDHOLD...

...FIRM OR
OTHERWISE!

THE EARTH-DIG SLIPS INTO UNCONSCIOUS-
NESS AND IS **TRIUMPHANTLY**
HELD ALOFT BY THE SPIDER-BEAST...



EVEN AS THE
SURROUNDING
WALLS BEGIN
A THROBBING
VIBRATION AND
FRAGMENTS BEGIN
TO SHOWER THE PAIR!



HE IS THE
LEADER OF THE
BLACK SUN
RELIGION AND SO,
THOUGH HE IS
PUMMELED BY
TONS OF ROCK,
HIS VOICE IS
FIRM AND
CLEAR, TO
FALL WOULD
BE UNTHINK-
ABLE...

ABOVE, AT THE EDGE
OF THE PIT, IN THE
MIDST OF ARMAGEDDON,
THE DARK MAJESTY
INTONES CENTURIES-OLD
INVOCATIONS...



HOVERING ABOVE UNENDING
BLACKNESS THE CREATURE
PROBES SEEKING A SOUL.
IT'S TERROR IS VERY
REAL...

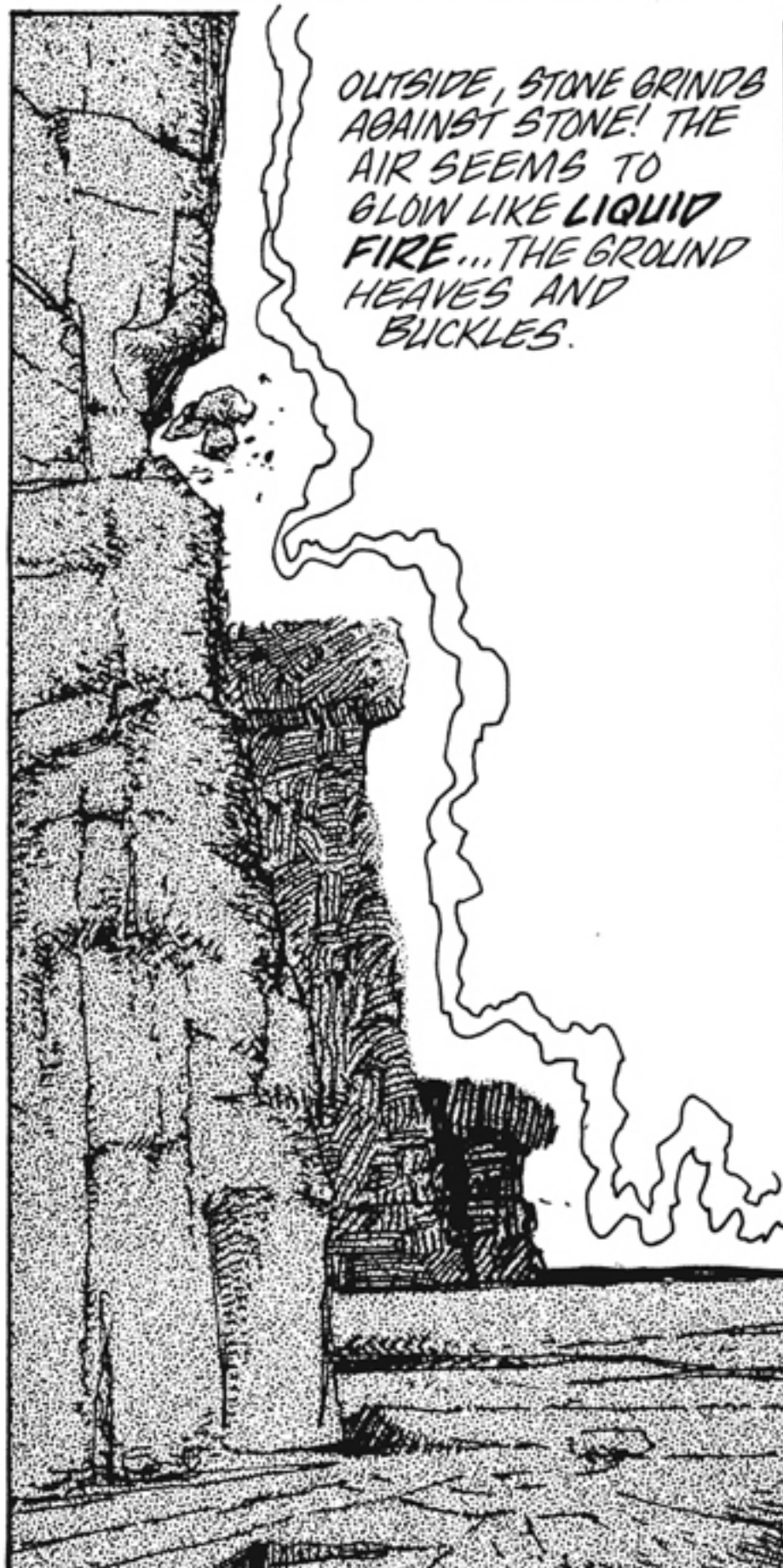
FOR ITS VERY **WORLD** HINGES
ON THE FIGURE IT HOLDS
LIGHTLY IN ITS **GRASP!**

ITS HIGH-
PITCHED
TRILLING
ENDS...

...
AND IS
REPLACED
BY A LOW
AND MOURN-
FUL **DIRGE!**

AT THE SURFACE, THE
TUMULT ENDS AS ABRUPTLY
AS IT BEGAN...

AND IS REPLACED BY
A DISTANT AND OMINOUS
ROARING...



OUTSIDE, STONE GRINDS
AGAINST STONE! THE
AIR SEEMS TO
GLOW LIKE **LIQUID**
FIRE... THE GROUND
HEAVES AND
BUCKLES.



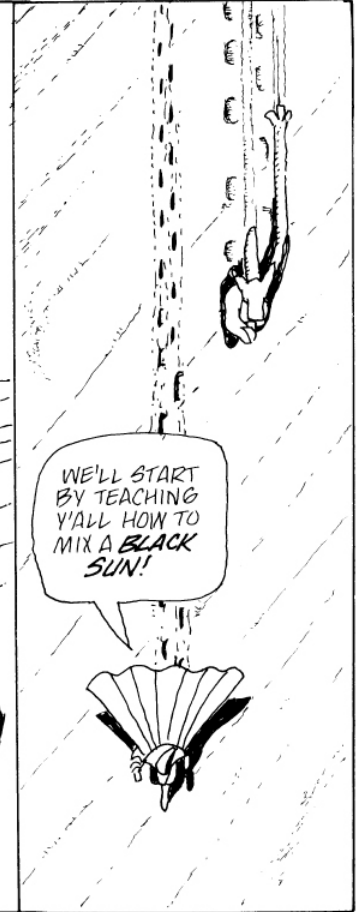
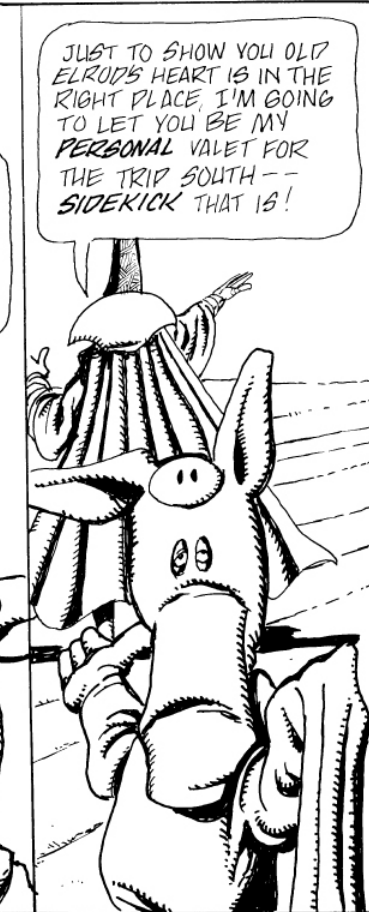
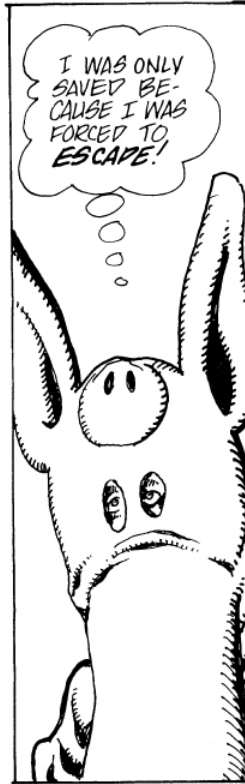
CEREBUS
FEELS A
CURIOUS
SENSATION OF
FALLING....



AND NOTICES
AN EIGHT LEGGED
MONSTROSITY
SPIRALLING
INTO OBLIVION
BELOW HIM...

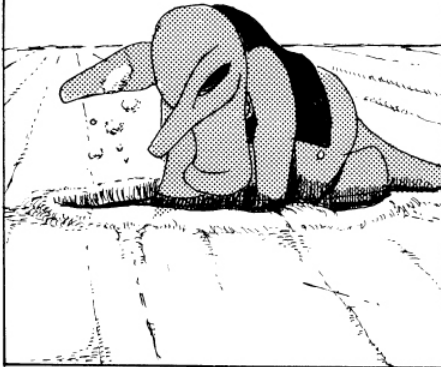


EVEN AS
EVERYTHING
EXPLODES IN A
BLINDING FLASH
OF WHITE LIGHT!

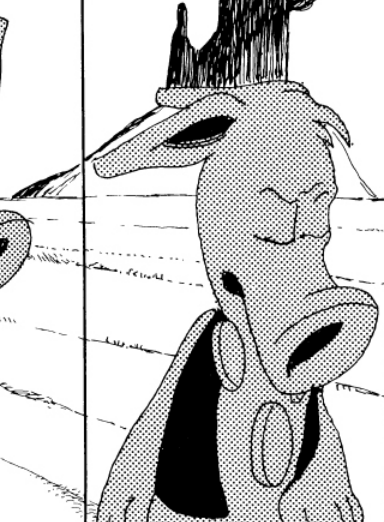
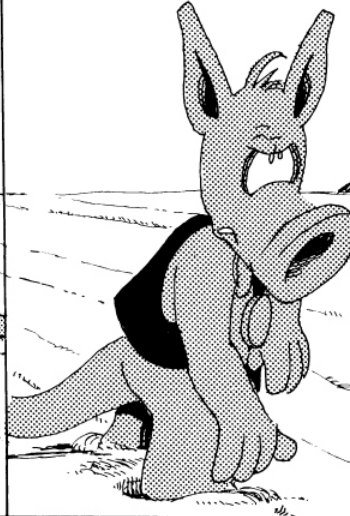


IT IS AN HOUR BEFORE
THE **EARTH-PIG** RISES.
WAS HE HURLED CLEAR
BY THE BLAST? RESCUED
BY A PRIEST?

HE NEITHER KNOWS
NOR **CARES!**



HE HAS JUST **LOST**
A KING'S RANSOM IN
DIAMONDS....AND ALMOST
HIS **LIFE** AS WELL...



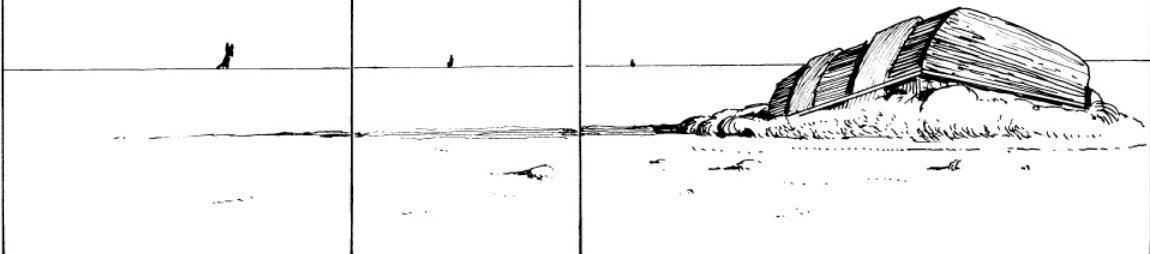
HE HAS NEVER THOUGHT
SO BITTERLY OF HIS
LIFE BEFORE! NO
MATTER HOW MUCH
LOOT HE STEALS, HOW
MANY **VALUABLES**
HE PLUNDERS, IT
IS NEVER **ENOUGH.**

HE IS TIRED AND SORE
AND HUNGRY AND BROKE!
MAYHAP IT IS TIME TO
SETTLE IN ONE PLACE...

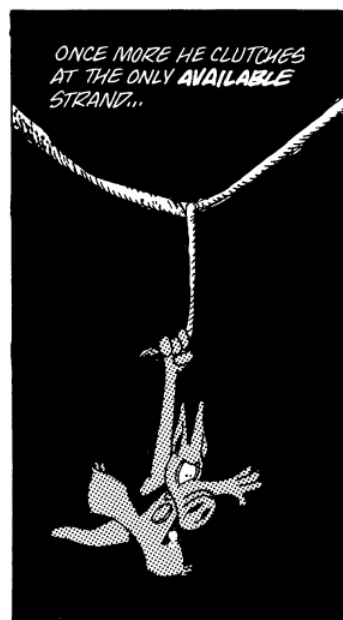
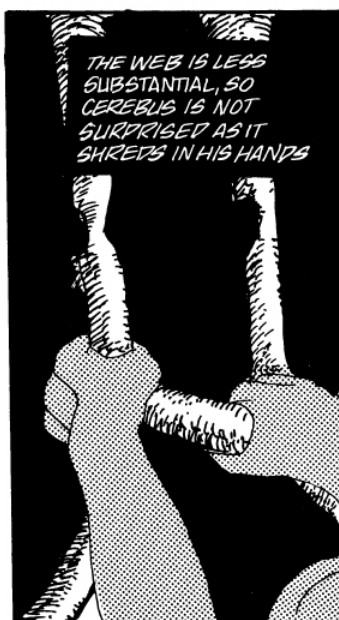
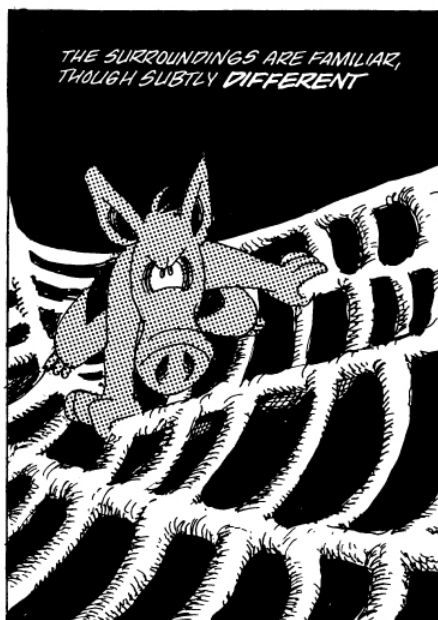
HE COULD RAISE
AN ARMY AND
CAPTURE ONE OF
THE **CITY-STATES**
FOR HIS OWN...

ANYTHING IS
BETTER
THAN HIS
PRESENT
HAND-TO-
MOUTH
EXISTENCE

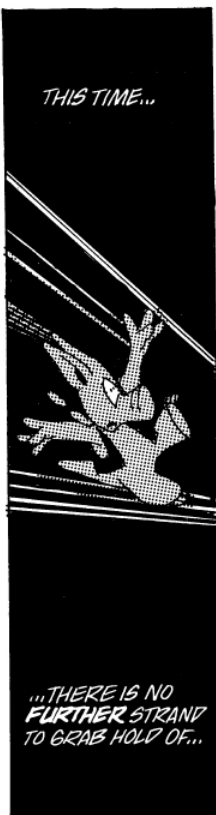
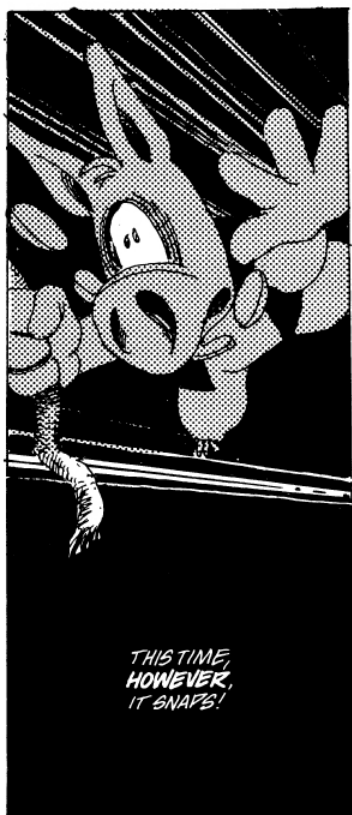
THERE JUST ISN'T
ANY **REWARD**
IN IT.

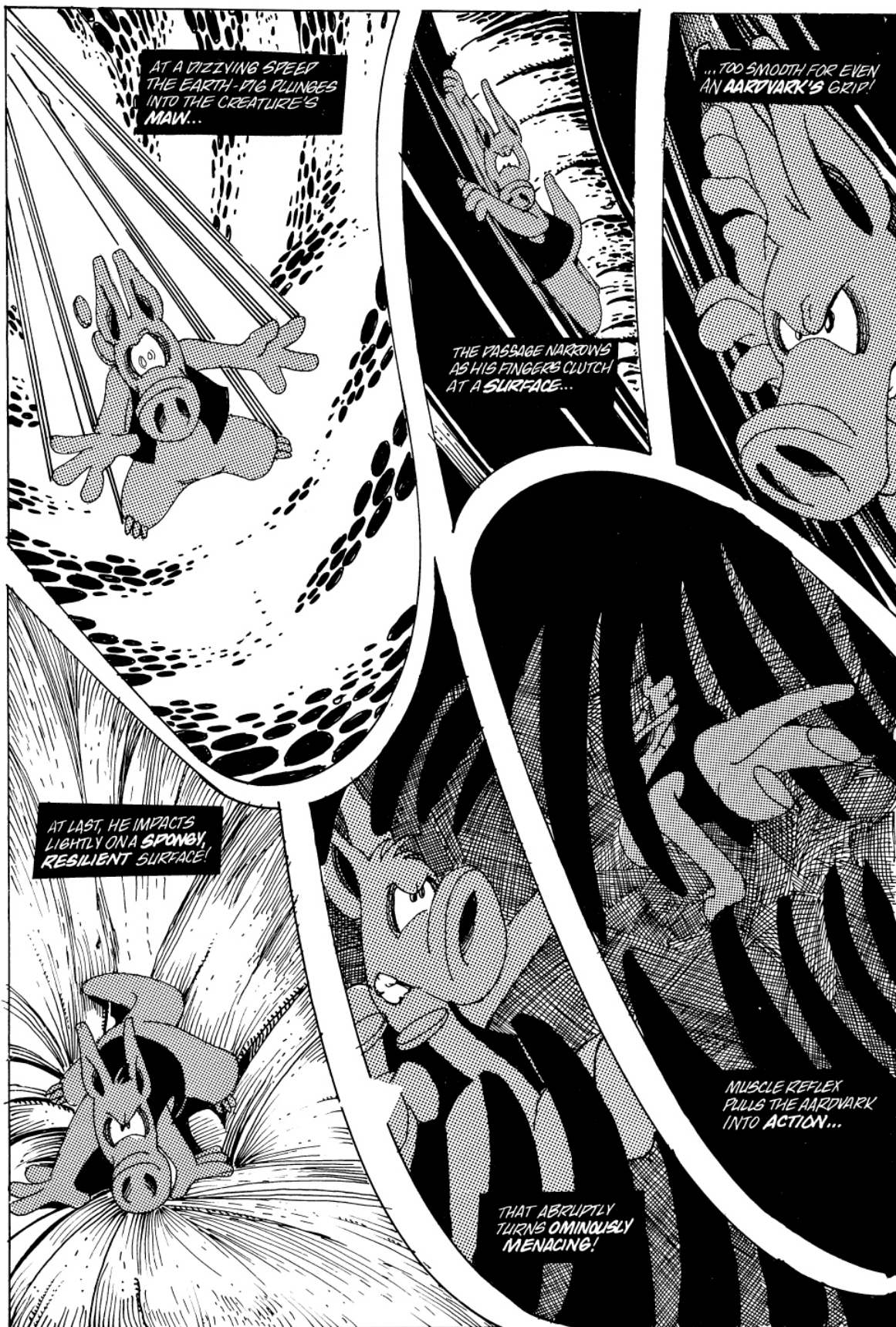


cerebus the aardvark



day ^{of} the EARTH-PIG!





AT A DIZZING SPEED
THE EARTH-PIG PLUNGES
INTO THE CREATURE'S
MAW...

...TOO SMOOTH FOR EVEN
AN AARDVARK'S GRIP!

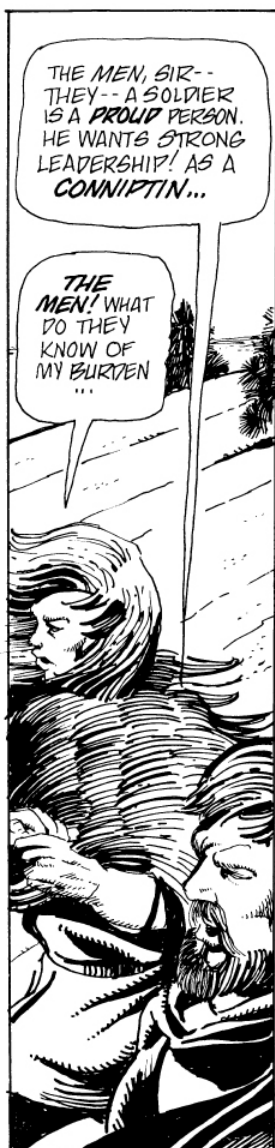
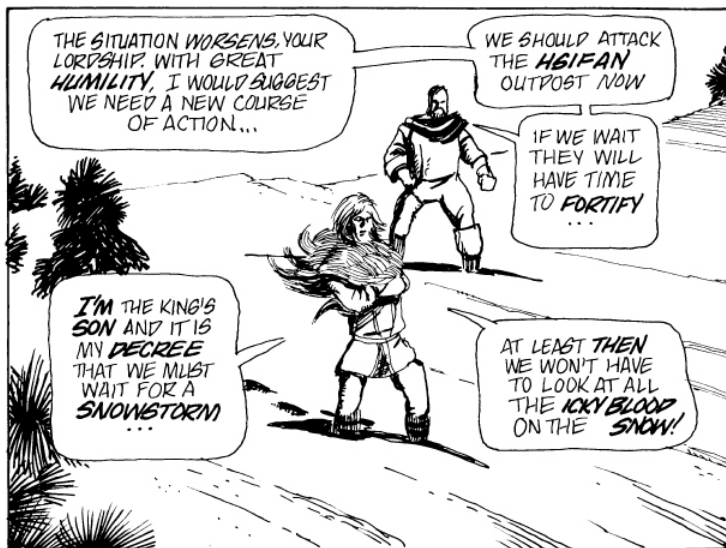
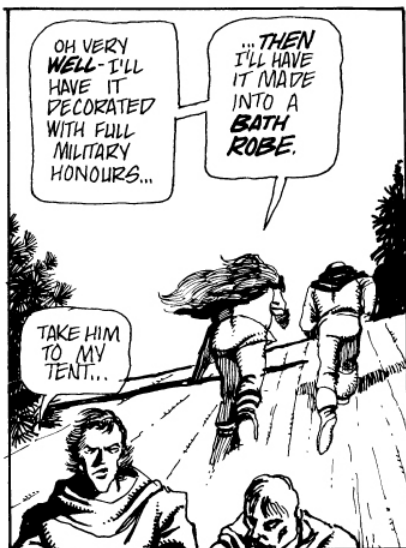
THE PASSAGE NARROWS
AS HIS FINGERS CLUTCH
AT A SURFACE...

AT LAST, HE IMPACTS
LIGHTLY ON A SPONGY,
RESILIENT SURFACE!

MUSCLE REFLEX
PULLS THE AARDVARK
INTO ACTION...

THAT ABRUPTLY
TURNS OMINOUSLY
MENACING!







YOU LEFT WORD THAT
YOU WISHED TO SEE
ME, **COMMANDER**?

AYE **CAPTAIN**--
DO COME
IN...

EVEN SO,
HIS **RACE** BUILDS
AND, THOUGH LESS
FREQUENTLY THAN
BEFORE...

AARDVARK MUSCLES
CONTINUE TO TEST
THEIR RESTRAINTS.

IT'S AN INFECTION IN THE WOUND--EVEN SO
HE'S MAKING AN **EXTRAORDINARY** RECOVERY!
IN AN HOUR HE'LL SNAP HIS BONDS
LIKE WOVEN GRASS...

I HAVE NO
INTEREST
IN HIS LORDSHIP'S
PETS. IF YOU'LL
EXCLUDE ME...

IF YOU DON'T WISH
TO DISCUSS HIS
PET'S FUTURE...

WHAT ABOUT HIS
LORDSHIP'S
FUTURE?



UNABLE TO RUN, HE
CEASES HIS STRUGGLES,
BUILDING HIS STRENGTH
FOR THE INEVITABLE
CONFRONTATION...

HE HEARS VOICES, NOW,
ORLY MUFFLED AND
INCOHERENT. "ENEMIES"
IS HIS ONLY CONCLUSION...

THE PLAN IS
RISKY...
I KNOW--

IT'S
FOOLHARDY!....
I'M A SOLDIER AND
I CAN TELL YOU THAT
AN ARMY IS A DELICATE
THING! A FEW BAD
WORDS FROM A
HANDFUL OF MEN
WITH **INFLUENCE**
WOULD BRING THIS
WHOLE MESS DOWN
AROUND OUR...

CAPTAIN TURL!
OH, CAP-TAIN!
COME OUT COME
OUT WHEREVER
YOU ARE! I'D
LIKE A CUP OF
GOAT'S MILK
...

...YOU KNOW
HOW CRANKY I
GET WITHOUT
MY GOAT'S MILK!

WE'LL START
TOMORROW
MORNING...

...**RISKY?**



HE FEELS HIMSELF LIFTED AND A NEW SENSATION AS COLD AIR SWIRLS AROUND HIM...

HE WISHES ONE THING-- TO FIND THE ONE RESPONSIBLE AND...

I KNOW WHO DID THIS TO YOU!

I ONLY HOPE YOU'RE AS GOOD WITH A **SWORD** AS YOU ARE WITH YOUR **TAIL**....

SICK, EH?!
GIVE ME THAT **SWORD**....

EXACTLY!
WHY-- IF YOU WEREN'T SO **SICK**, I THINK I'D JUST GIVE YOU BACK YOUR **SWORD** AND LET YOU GO OUT AND RUN **ROUGHSHOD** OVER...

THOSE **CAMPFIRES** OVER THERE... THAT'S WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE ONES WHO **DRUGGED** YOU...

DRUGGED, EH?

NO ONE **DRUGS CEREBUS** AND LIVES TO TELL OF IT!

A **SWORD** IN HIS HAND HE **SWELLS** WITH **CONFIDENCE**, IGNORING THE **LANDSCAPE**, WHICH REELS DRUNKENLY AROUND HIM...





MOMENTS LATER, FOOTSTEPS CRUNCH THROUGH THE LATE NOVEMBER SNOWS...

HE IGNORES THE FOUR BODIES SPRAWLED IN THE SNOW AND THE REDDISH POOLS AROUND THEM...

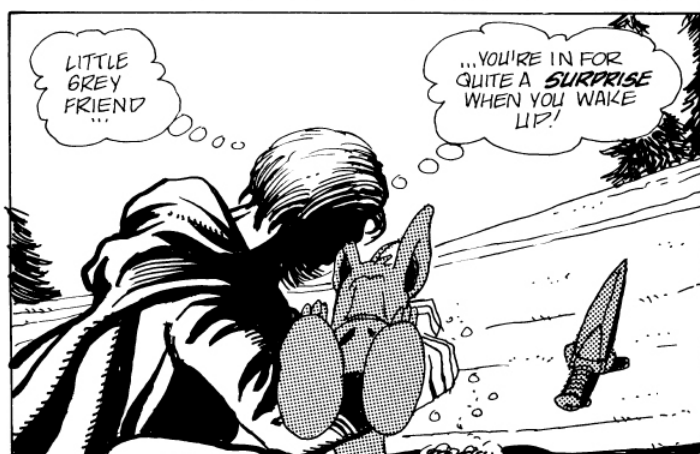
INSTEAD, HE FOLLOWS THE SOUND OF IRREGULAR BREATHING TO ITS SHORT, GREY AND FURRY SOURCE...



HMMM! RESPIRATION AND PULSE RAPID BUT STRONG! THE WOUND IS OPEN AGAIN...

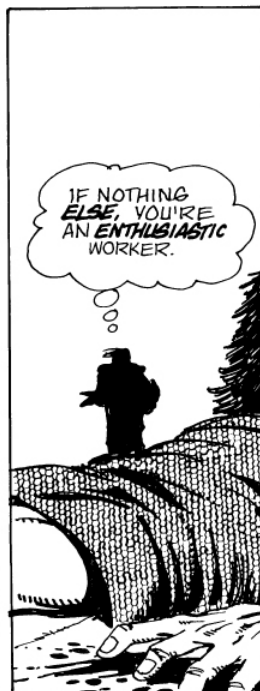
...BUT THE INFECTION HAS ALMOST STOPPED SPREADING...

EXCELLENT!



LITTLE GREY FRIEND...

...YOU'RE IN FOR QUITE A SURPRISE WHEN YOU WAKE UP!



IF NOTHING ELSE, YOU'RE AN ENTHUSIASTIC WORKER.



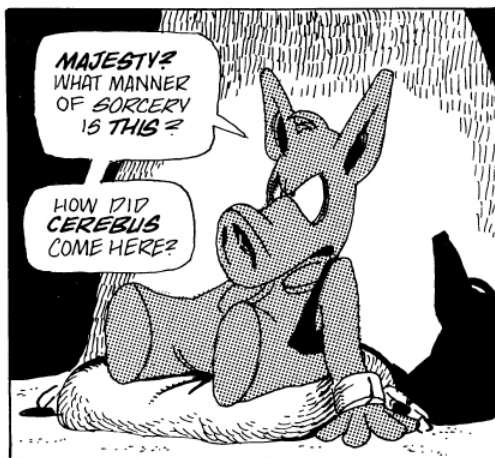
ARE YOU **SURE** HE'S MANACLED **TIGHTLY?** HEALED, HE HAS ENOUGH STRENGTH TO



AH, HE'S COMING **AROUND** ...



GOOD MORROW, YOUR **MAJESTY**



MAJESTY? WHAT MANNER OF **SORCERY** IS THIS?

HOW DID **CEREBUS** COME HERE?

THE STORY IS RELATED OF HOW HE WAS DISCOVERED WANDERING THE SNOW FIELDS -- OF HIS DEFEAT OF THE HSIFAN BORDER RAIDERS! **CEREBUS** RECALLS HIS BATTLE WITH THE SPIDER BEAST IN THE TEMPLE OF THE **BLACK SUN!** THE PAIN IN HIS BACK REMINDS HIM OF THE DAYS OF CONFUSION FOLLOWING THE BATTLE! HIS MIND IN A **WHIRL**, HE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO FIND HIS WAY TO THE COAST AS HE HAD PLANNED. THOUGH THE COMMANDER TRIES TO EXPLAIN "DOCTOR", "INFECTION" AND "FEVER", **CEREBUS** ATTRIBUTES THEM TO ONE OF THE NEW REGENERATIVE SORCERY DISCIPLINES AND LISTENS NO FURTHER...



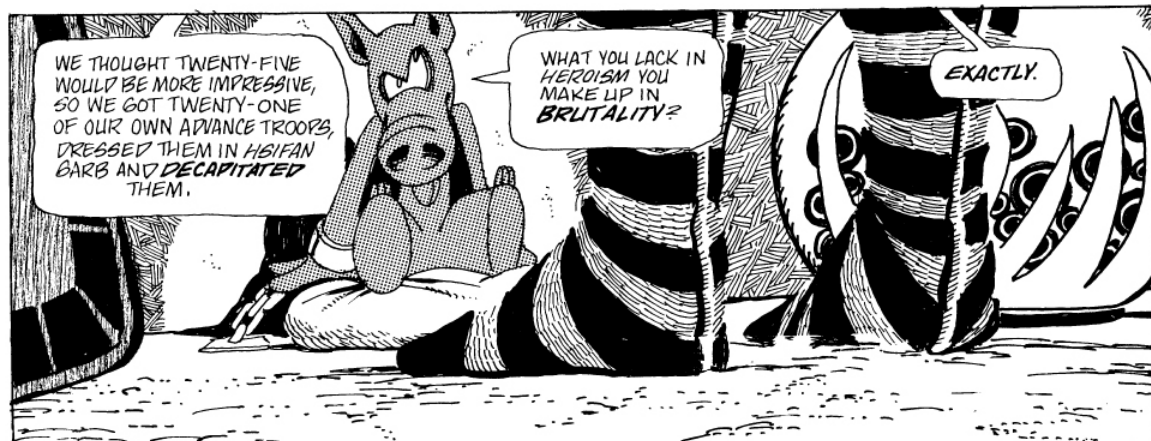
THE MEN ARE QUITE TAKEN WITH YOUR ONE-MAN **SLAUGHTER** OF THOSE TWENTY-FIVE BORDER RAIDERS...

I'D OFFER YOU SOME WINE, BUT I CAN SEE YOU'RE ALL TIED UP...



I THOUGHT YOU SAID **CEREBUS** HAD KILLED **FOUR** MEN....

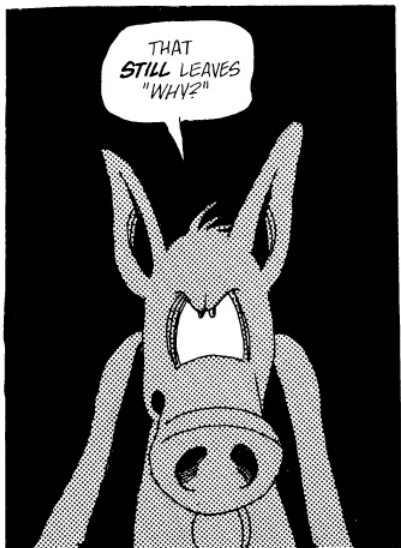
OH, THAT.



WE THOUGHT TWENTY-FIVE WOULD BE MORE IMPRESSIVE, SO WE GOT TWENTY-ONE OF OUR OWN ADVANCE TROOPS, DRESSED THEM IN HSIFAN BARB AND **DECAPITATED** THEM.

WHAT YOU LACK IN **HEROISM** YOU MAKE UP IN **BRUTALITY?**

EXACTLY.





THESE SOUTHLANDS
-- THEY'RE **WEALTHY**
THEN?



NO, **IMPOVERISHED**. THE GOLD
RESERVES ARE DEPLETED...
EACH SPRING PRODUCES A SMALLER
CROP THAN THE ONE BEFORE...

DISEASE IS
RAVAGING
THE PEOPLE
....



THEN WHY
RECAPTURE
THEM?



FOR THE
CONNIPPIN
IDEALS...

MIGHT
MAKES
RIGHT...



MIGHT
FOR
RIGHT!

MIGHT
FOR
MIGHT!

RIGHT
FOR
MIGHT!

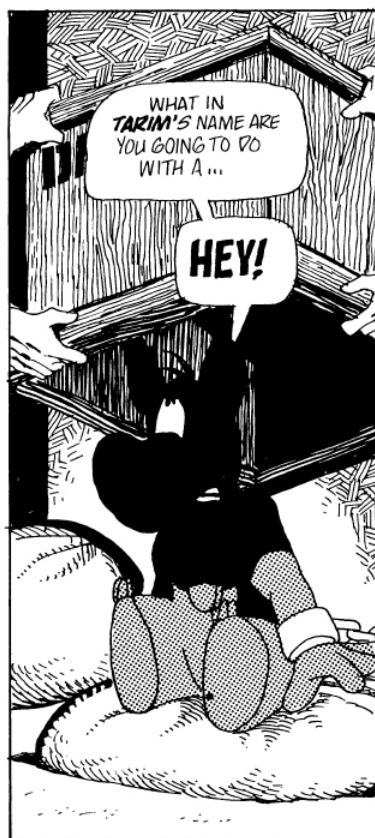


FIGHT!
FIGHT!
FIGHT!



I DON'T
KNOW ABOUT
WARRIORS
...

...BUT THE CONNIPTINS
SEEM TO MAKE GOOD
CHEERLEADERS.







TARIM!

YOUR
LORDSHIP?



NOT *NOW*, IDIOT--
TARIM AND THE
OTHER GODS ARE
IN NEED OF MY
AID IN A GREAT
GOD WAR!!

**I'M COMING, TARIM!
HOLD ONTO YOUR
THUNDERBOLTS!**



WHEW! FOR
A MINUTE I
THOUGHT THAT
WE...



HI
THERE
...

...
**REMEMBER
ME?**



WHO IN
TARIM'S
NAME WAS
...

OUR
GLORIOUS
LEADER,



HE IS THE SON OF HEZZRETH
... WE HAVE LED HIM TO
BELIEVE THAT YOU WERE
MADE INTO THAT BATH-
ROBE...

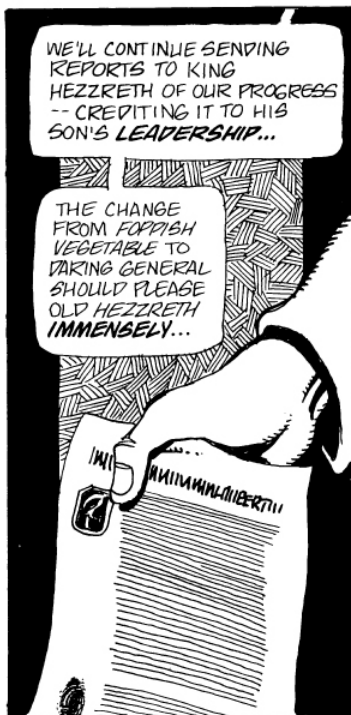


IT WAS **IMPOSSIBLE** FOR
US TO KILL HIS LORDSHIP
AND HAVE YOU FORMALLY
INSTALLED AS OUR NEW
LEADER...

HEZZRETH'S FORCES
WOULD HAVE CLOSED
IN AND HOUNDED US
TO THE GATES OF
JEST ITSELF...



SO YOU WISH
CEREBUS TO
TAKE OVER
FROM THIS
MORON?



WE'LL CONTINUE SENDING
REPORTS TO KING
HEZZRETH OF OUR PROGRESS
-- CREDITING IT TO HIS
SON'S **LEADERSHIP**...

THE CHANGE
FROM FOPDISH
VEGETABLE TO
TAKING GENERAL
SHOULD PLEASE
OLD HEZZRETH
IMMENSELY...



UNTIL WE TAKE BACK
JEET, HIS LORDSHIP'S
THUMBPRINT WILL BE
REQUIRED ON THOSE
REPORTS. AFTER THAT
HE WILL BE **KILLED**
....



AND YOU WILL BE
CROWNED **CEREBUS**
THE FIRST -- RULER
OF THE NEW CONNIPTIN
EMPIRE!



AND IF
CEREBUS
SHOULD
REFUSE?



THAT
COULD PROVE
DIFFICULT
...

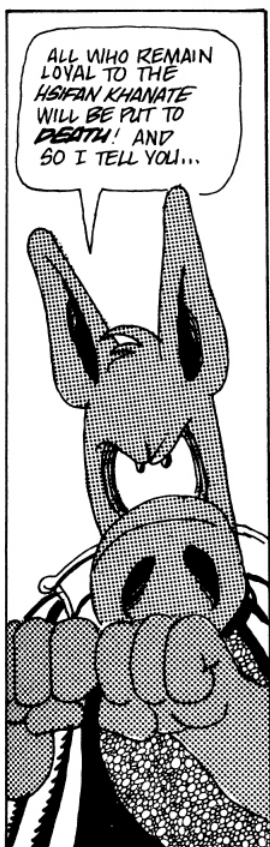
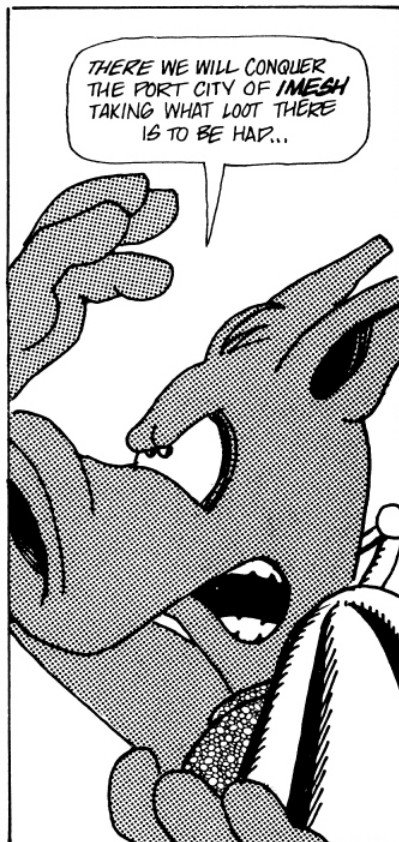
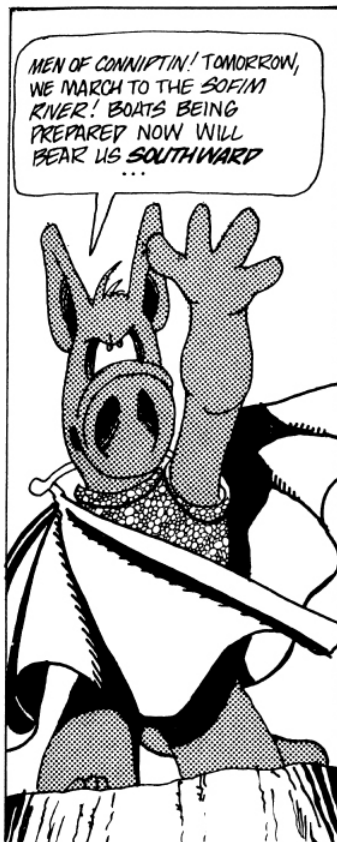
THE MEN HAVE
THIS...uh... **QUIRK**.



QUIRK?

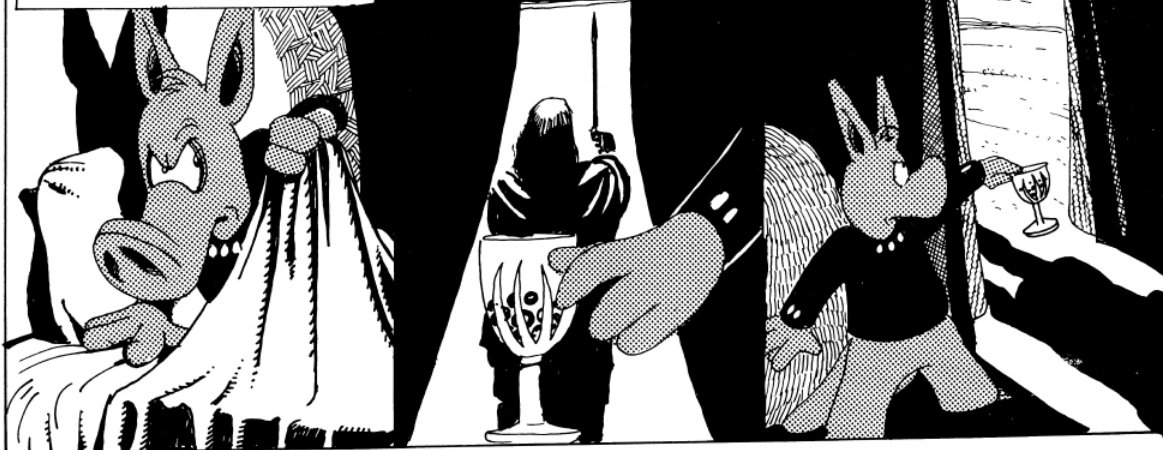


BY CONNIPTIN LAW, ANYONE
CHOSEN AS LEADER WHO
REFUSES THE HONOUR
IS... **DISEMBOWELLED**.



CEREBUS KNOWS THE WAYS OF MEN TOO WELL! THE COMMANDER BETRAYS HIS AMBITION WITH EVERY WORD! HE WISHES THE AARDVARK TO BE A SWORD-WIELDING PUPPET RULER...

ESCAPE SHOULD BE EASY, BUT MUCH DEPENDS ON WHETHER CEREBUS CAN REACH THE SOFIN BEFORE THE MOON RISES...



SNAAK

LINH?



YOUR HIGHNESS? IS THERE...



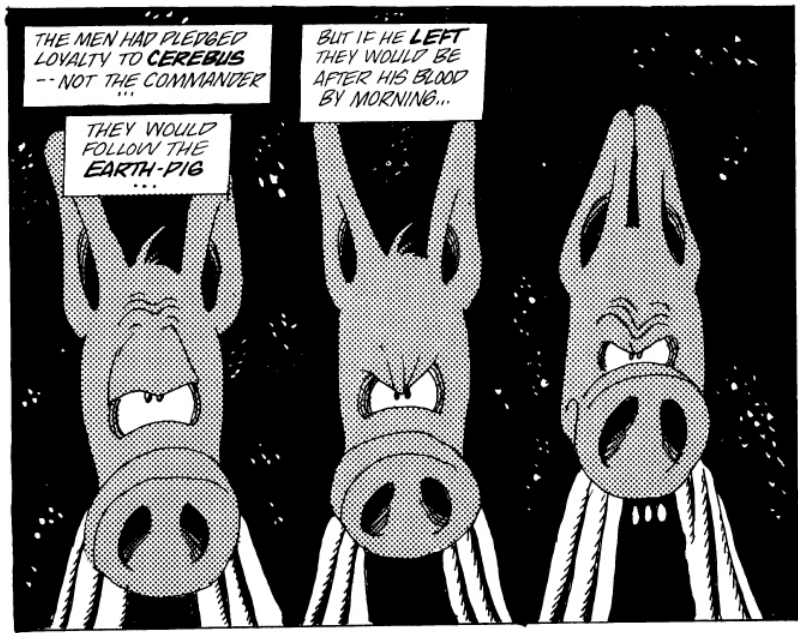
CRASH

SECONDS LATER, CEREBUS HAS SNATCHED UP A HEAVY CLOAK AND PLUNGES OFF INTO THE NIGHT...





HE HAS BARELY GONE FIFTY YARDS, WHEN **CEREBUS** STOPS IN HIS TRACKS...



THE MEN HAD PLEDGED LOYALTY TO **CEREBUS** -- NOT THE COMMANDER...

BUT IF HE **LEFT** THEY WOULD BE AFTER HIS BLOOD BY MORNING...

THEY WOULD FOLLOW THE **EARTH-PIG**...



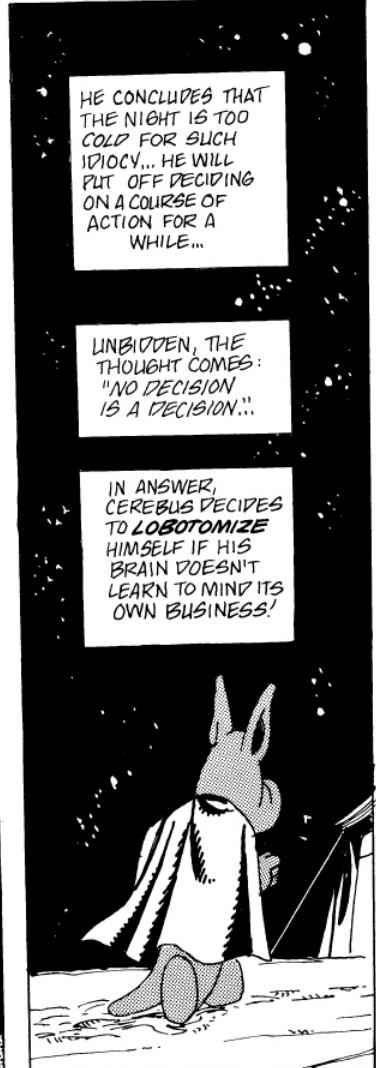
THE PARADOX SINKS IN SLOWLY AS **INSTINCT** AND **REASON** JOCKEY FOR POSITION IN THE AARDVARK'S BRAIN...

INSTINCT DEMANDS THAT HE ESCAPE FROM ANY PRISON-- "CEREBUS CALLS NO MAN 'MASTER'!"

REASON DEMANDS THAT HE NOT TURN HIS BACK ON WARM FOOD, GOOD WINE, A SOFT BED AND A CHANCE FOR BATTLE...



A LOW GROWL RUMBLES IN HIS THROAT! SELF-EXAMINATION APPEALS TO **CEREBUS** ABOUT AS MUCH AS DEBATING THEOLOGY WITH A PANIROVIAN MONK...



HE CONCLUDES THAT THE NIGHT IS TOO COLD FOR SUCH IDIOCY... HE WILL PUT OFF DECIDING ON A COURSE OF ACTION FOR A WHILE...

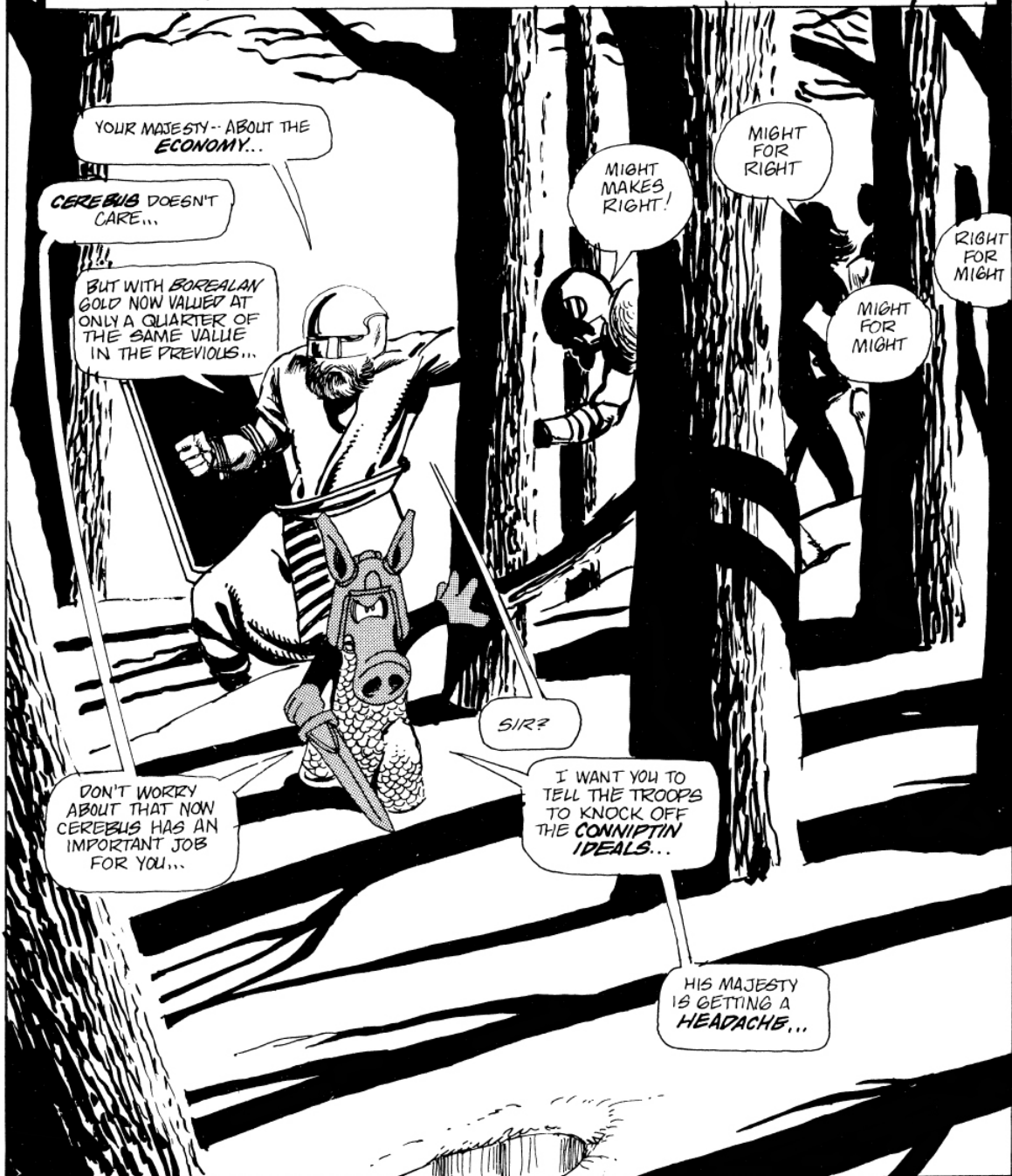
UNBIDDEN, THE THOUGHT COMES: "NO DECISION IS A DECISION..."

IN ANSWER, **CEREBUS** DECIDES TO **LOBOTOMIZE** HIMSELF IF HIS BRAIN DOESN'T LEARN TO MIND ITS OWN BUSINESS!



CEREBUS THE AARDVARK

SWORDS AGAINST IMESH



YOUR MAJESTY-- ABOUT THE
ECONOMY...

CEREBUS DOESN'T
CARE...

BUT WITH *BOREALAN*
GOLD NOW VALUED AT
ONLY A QUARTER OF
THE SAME VALUE
IN THE PREVIOUS...

DON'T WORRY
ABOUT THAT NOW
CEREBUS HAS AN
IMPORTANT JOB
FOR YOU...

MIGHT
MAKES
RIGHT!

MIGHT
FOR
RIGHT

RIGHT
FOR
MIGHT

MIGHT
FOR
MIGHT

SIR?

I WANT YOU TO
TELL THE TROOPS
TO KNOCK OFF
THE *CONNIPTIN*
IDEALS...

HIS MAJESTY
IS GETTING A
HEADACHE...

SO MANY YEARS SINCE HE HAD SEEN **IMESH**... THOUGH NONE HAD EVER TAKEN THE CITY FROM THE REAR, CEREBUS BELIEVED IT **POSSIBLE**...

THE **HSIFAN** HAVEN'T POSTED SENTRIES ON THE SOUTH WALL IN YEARS...

WE'LL MAKE OUR WAY AROUND TO THE GATE! STAY **CLOSE** TO THE WALL AND THEY SHOULDN'T SEE US.

AND IF THEY DO?

IF THEY DO, YOU CAN STOP WORRYING ABOUT THE VALUE OF **BOREALAN** GOLD AND START WORRYING ABOUT YOUR NECK...

THE GATE IS THE SOFT UNDER-BELLY OF **IMESH**! IF WE CAN SURPRISE THE GUARDS AND GET **INSIDE**...

NAUGHT WILL STAND IN OUR WAY, SAVE **UNARMED** CITIZENS OF THE CITY...

EVEN AS HE SPEAKS, CEREBUS WONDERS IF IT **IS** POSSIBLE! WITH HAND-PICKED TROOPS **PERHAPS**...

BUT THE CONNIPTINS LACK WAR MACHINES, BOWMEN, PIKEMEN -- TO LAY SIEGE TO EVEN A **RAVAGED** CITY LIKE **IMESH** WITH CUT-AND-THRUST SWORDS SEEMS THE **HEIGHT** OF FOLLY...

JUST WHAT CEREBUS ALWAYS WANTED -- TO DIE AS REIGNING KING OF THE **CHEERLEADERS**

MIGHT FOR MIGHT

RIGHT FOR MIGHT

RIGHT FOR MIGHT

FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT

TIGHT AGAINST THE EAST WALL, THE CONNIPTIN FORCES SURGE FORWARD

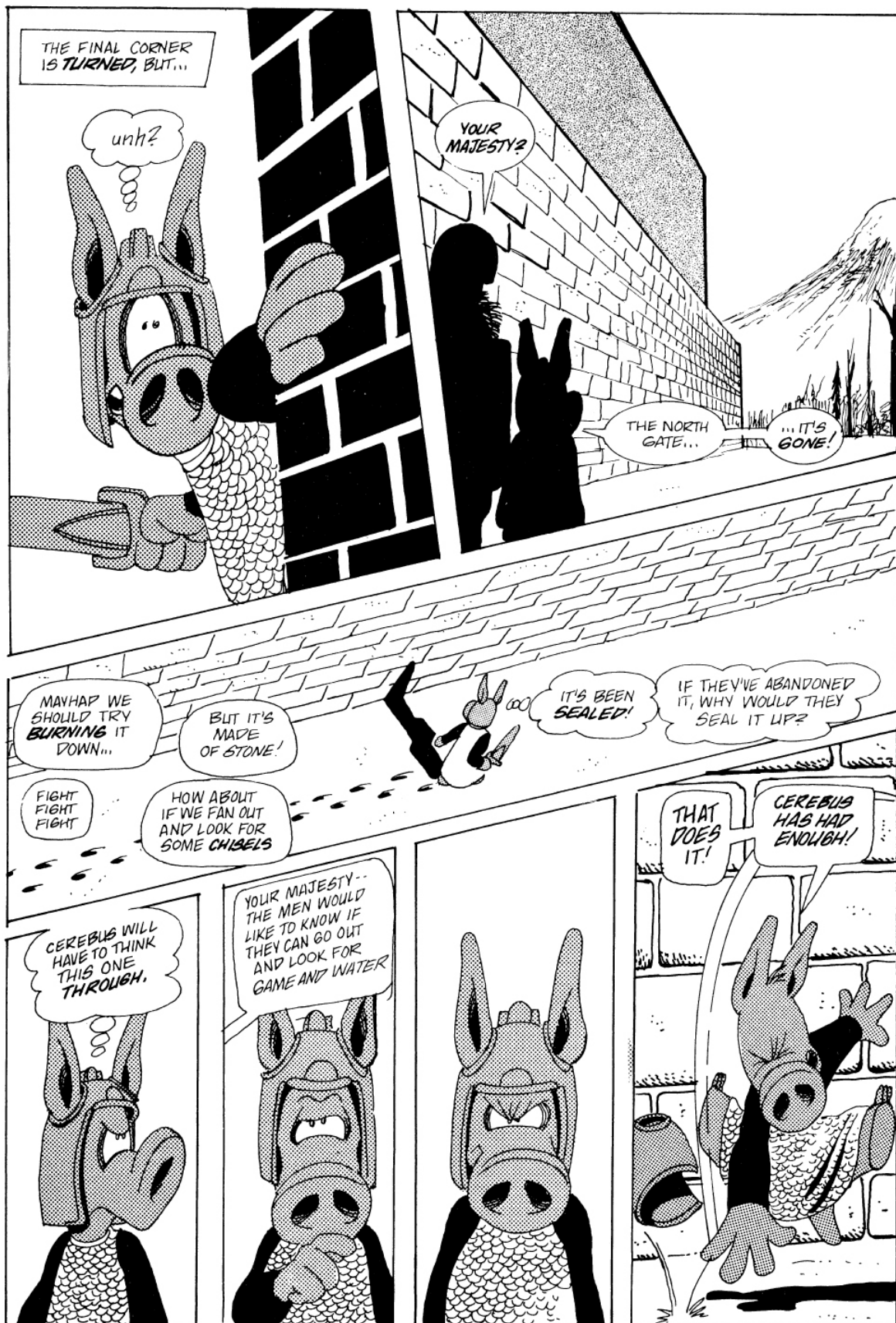
RIGHT FOR MIGHT

MIGHT FOR MIGHT

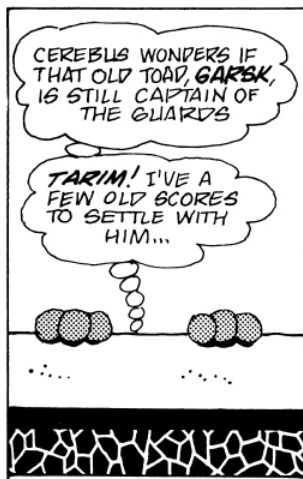
HEY-- WATCH WHO YOU'RE SHOVING

SHHH

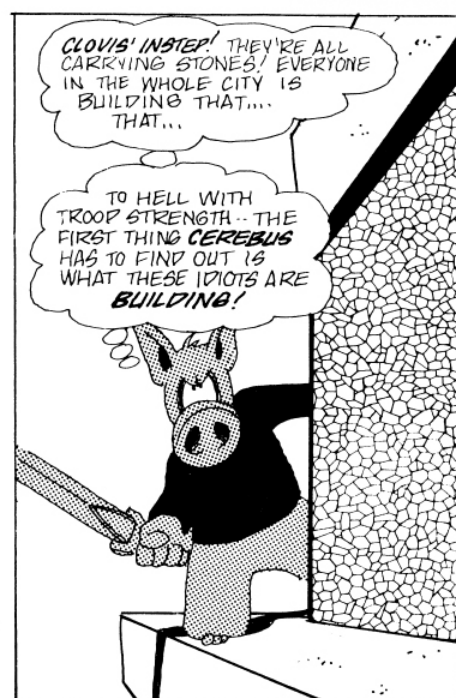
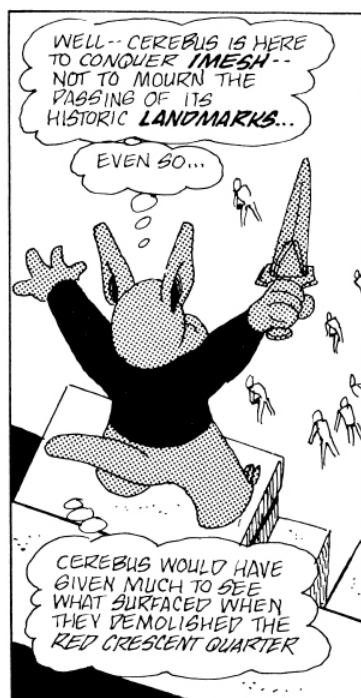
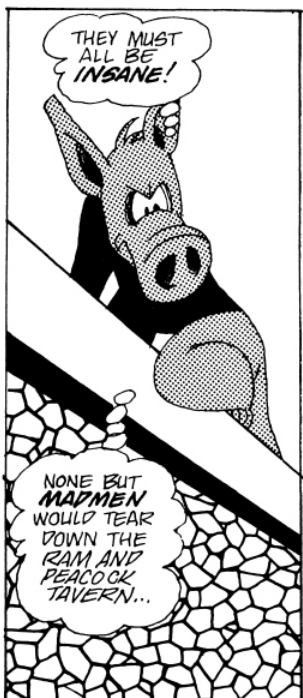
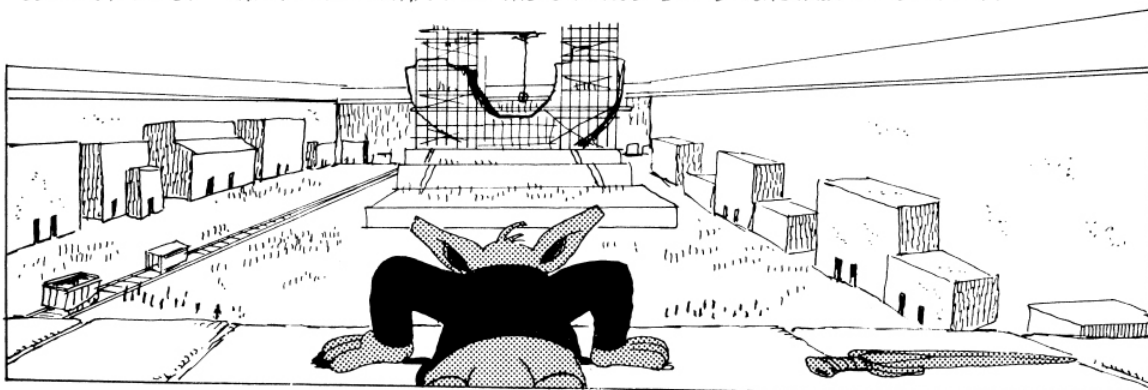
CEREBUS SHOULD HAVE CHOSEN A SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AS THE FIRST CONQUEST!

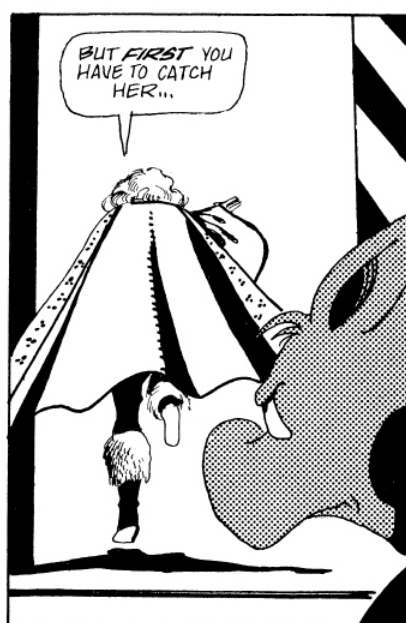
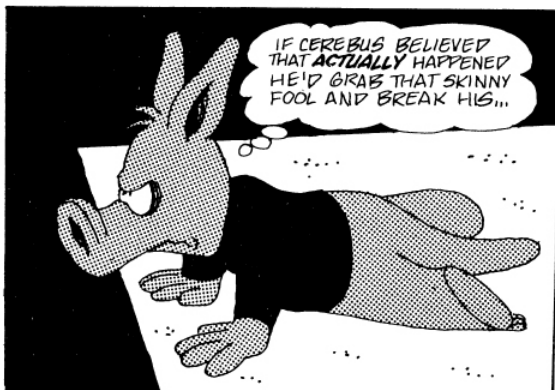
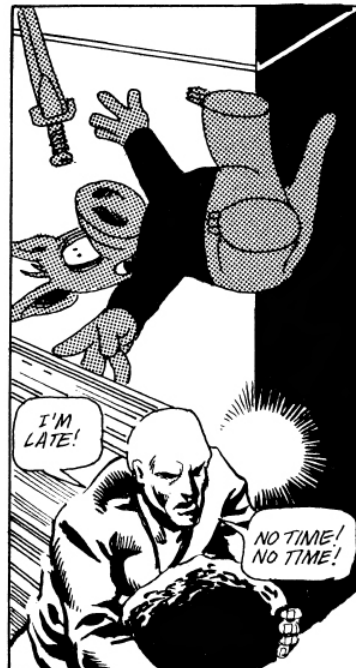
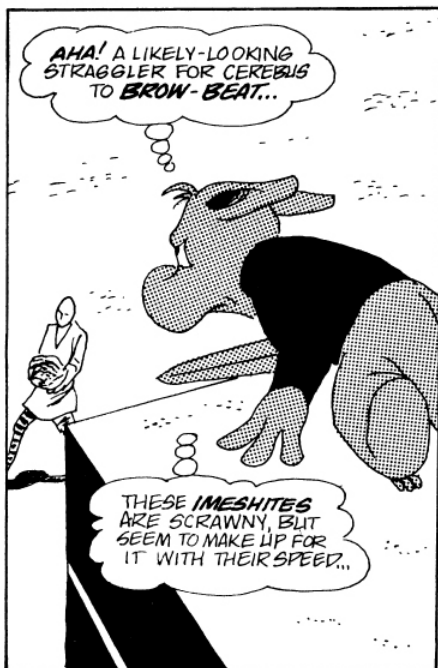






"**TARIM**" MUTTERS THE EARTH PIG "FIRST THE GATE IS MISSING AND NOW IT'S THE WHOLE DAMN CITY!" GONE ARE THE WINDING STREETS AND ANCIENT BUILDINGS OF THE AARDVARK'S YOUTH! THE PERIMETER OF THE CITY IS COMPOSED OF CRUDE STONE BUILDINGS WHILE THE CORE IS DOMINATED BY A HUGE ALTAR SWARMING WITH WORKERS AND MASON'S! IN POINT OF FACT, THE WHOLE CITY'S ENERGIES SEEM DIRECTED TOWARD THE ALTAR AND THE STRANGE STONE CONSTRUCTION UPON IT...







AHA! A DOORWAY!
NARROW AND
CONCEALED ENOUGH
THAT CEREBUS WOULD
HAVE MISSED IT...

...HAD HE
NOT SEEN
THE WENCH
ENTER...



TAP TAP

A STAIR WAY!
DOUBTLESS
THE WENCH IS
COVERING IN
THE DARKNESS.



TUMP
TUMP
TUMP
TUMP
TUMP
TUMP



KLANK



WELL...

CEREBUS
KNEW HE
WAS GOING
TO REGRET
IT...



ABRUPTLY, A SERIES
OF TORCHES FLARE
TO LIFE, REVEALING A
MASSIVE FIGURE...

I AM K'COR...
KING OF
IMESH!...

SEORA TELLS ME SHE
SAW YOU TALKING TO
ONE OF MY SLAVES...



CEREBUS
WAS...

WELL? SPEAK UP--
YOU MUST HAVE
QUESTIONS ABOUT
MY CHANGES...

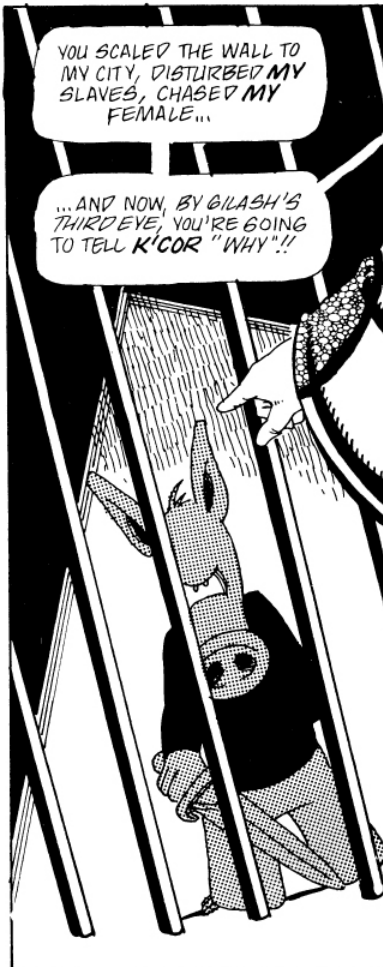
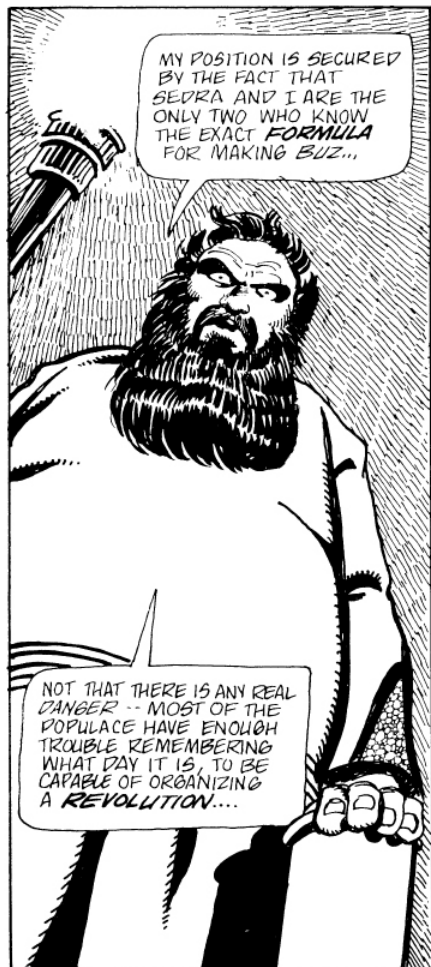
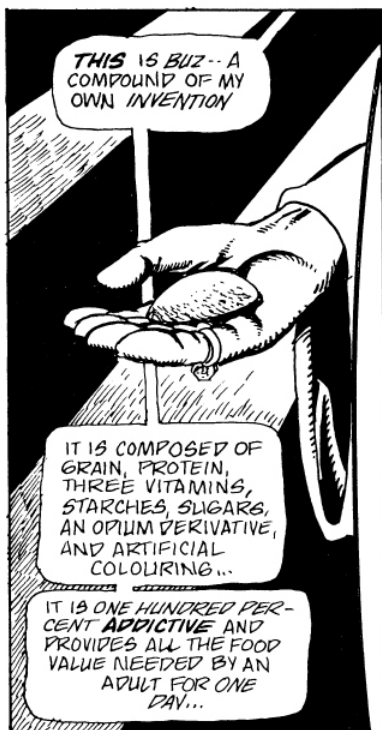
YES, WHY DID
YOU SEAL THE
CITY LIKE...



NOT THE CITY, FOOL--
MY CITY! I OWN THE
PEOPLE, THE BUILDINGS
--EVERYTHING! ALL
WITHIN THESE WALLS
ARE MY SLAVES...

WE NEED NO GATES!
MY SLAVES HAVE NO
INTEREST IN THE
OUTSIDE WORLD--
SO LONG AS THEY
GET THEIR BUZZ
THEY ARE CONTENT
TO SERVE ME...

BUZZ?





CEREBUS CAME TO **IMESH** FOR ONLY ONE REASON AND THAT WAS TO...



NEVER MIND--I **KNOW** WHY YOU CAME! WE HAVE A BARBARIAN COME OVER THE WALL ABOUT TWICE A YEAR! THEY'RE USUALLY IGNORANT NORTH-LANDERS IN SEARCH OF **LOOT**...



ONCE THEY SEE MY SLAVES, THEY CONVINCE THEMSELVES THAT THEY MUST HELP MY SLAVES TO REVOLT-- "TEACH THEM TO DIE LIKE MEN"-- WHATEVER THAT MEANS...



AYE! K'COR KNOWS YOU BARBARIANS TOO WELL-- WHEN MY SLAVES SHOW NO INTEREST IN REVOLTING YOU DECIDE THAT YOU WILL AT LEAST TAKE SEDRA TO 'SAFETY' WITH YOU.



BUT, DEAR SEDRA IS NOT INTERESTED, **WITLING!** SHE CHERISHES HER PLACE AT MY SIDE, AND HAS NO INTEREST IN THE WIMS OF **BARBARIANS**...

...ISN'T THAT RIGHT, SEDRA?

YES, BELOVED.



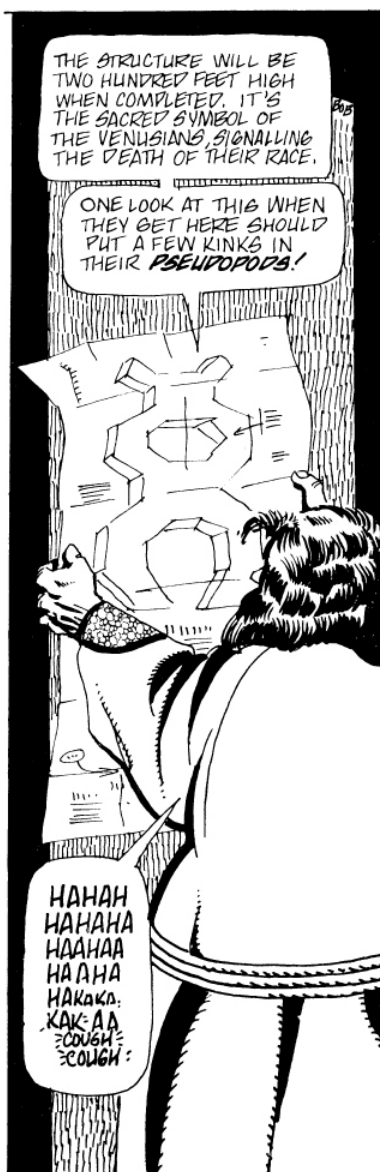
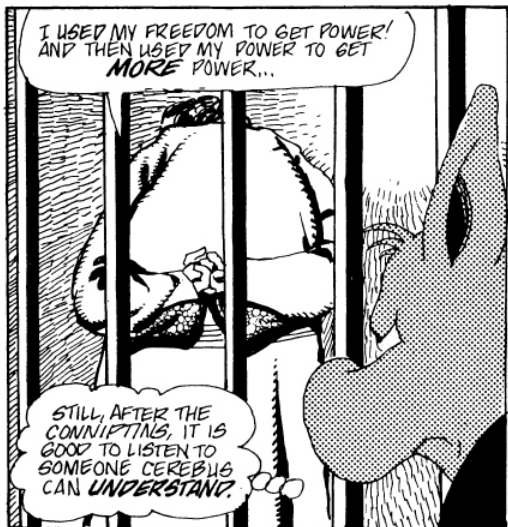
FREED MY SLAVES-- **IDIOTCY!** FREE THEM FOR WHAT? SO THEY CAN WANDER THE SNOWS AND STARVE TO DEATH? HERE THEY HAVE LIFE, WARMTH AND HAPPINESS!

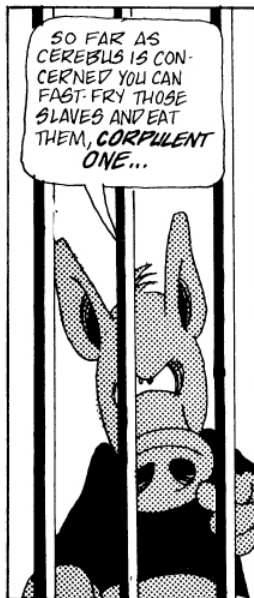
CEREBUS CAME TO...



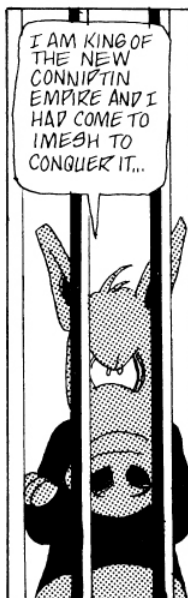
I **KNOW** WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY! "THEY ARE MEN AND MEN SHOULD BE FREE" A FREEMAN IS DANGEROUS TO HIMSELF AND EVERYONE ELSE. **FREEDOM** SHOULD BE LEFT TO THOSE WHO CAN PUT IT TO GOOD **USE**...

CEREBUS COULD DIE OF OLD AGE WAITING FOR FORKY THERE TO RUN OUT OF WING...

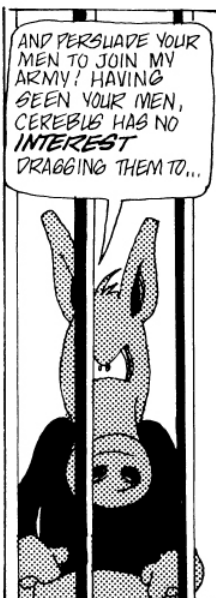




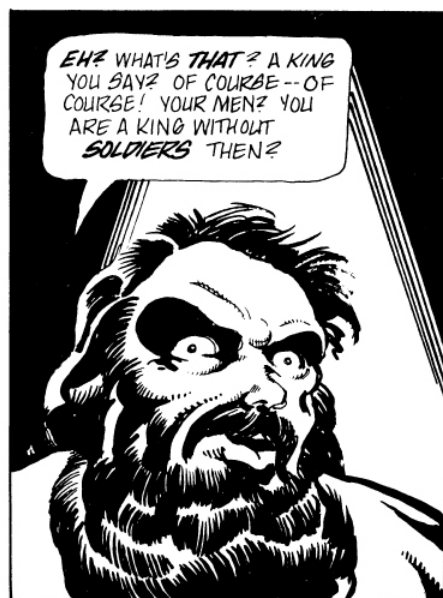
SO FAR AS CEREBUS IS CONCERNED YOU CAN FAST-FRY THOSE SLAVES AND EAT THEM, **CORPULENT ONE...**



I AM KING OF THE NEW CONNIPTIN EMPIRE AND I HAD COME TO IMESH TO CONQUER IT...



AND PERSUADE YOUR MEN TO JOIN MY ARMY! HAVING SEEN YOUR MEN, CEREBUS HAS NO **INTEREST** DRAGGING THEM TO...



EH? WHAT'S **THAT?** A KING YOU SAY? OF COURSE -- OF COURSE! YOUR MEN? YOU ARE A KING WITHOUT **SOLDIERS** THEN?



CEREBUS LEFT THEM FORAGING FOR FOOD AND WATER OUTSIDE YOUR WALLS--

AS THERE SEEMS TO BE NO REASON FOR CEREBUS TO REMAIN HERE, HE WISHES TO...

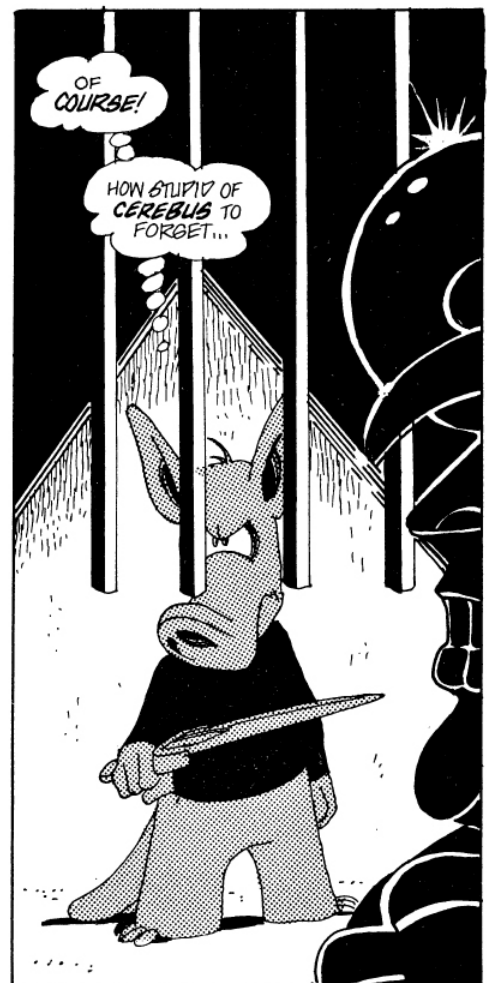
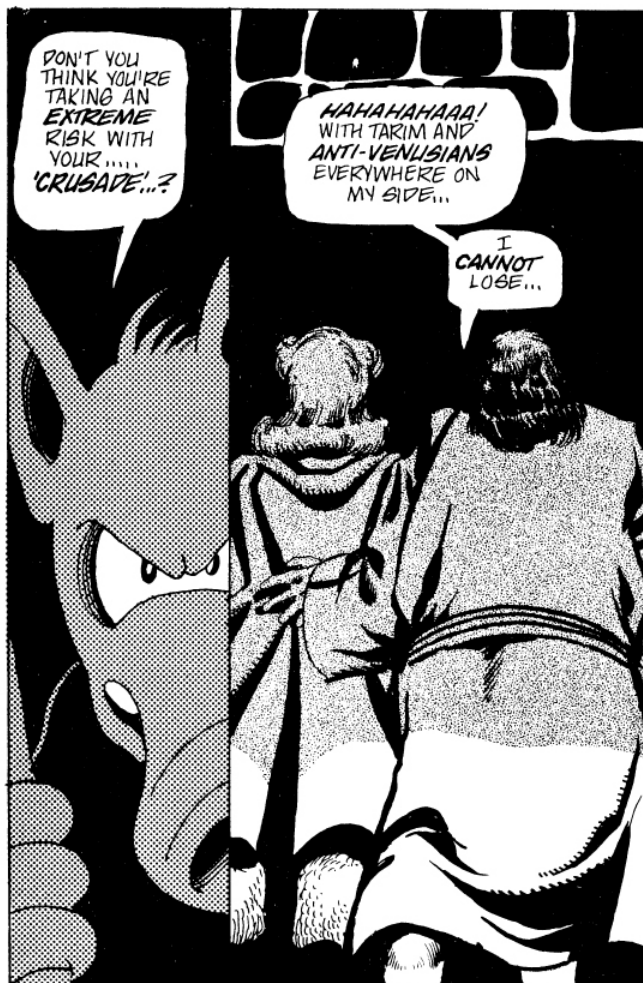
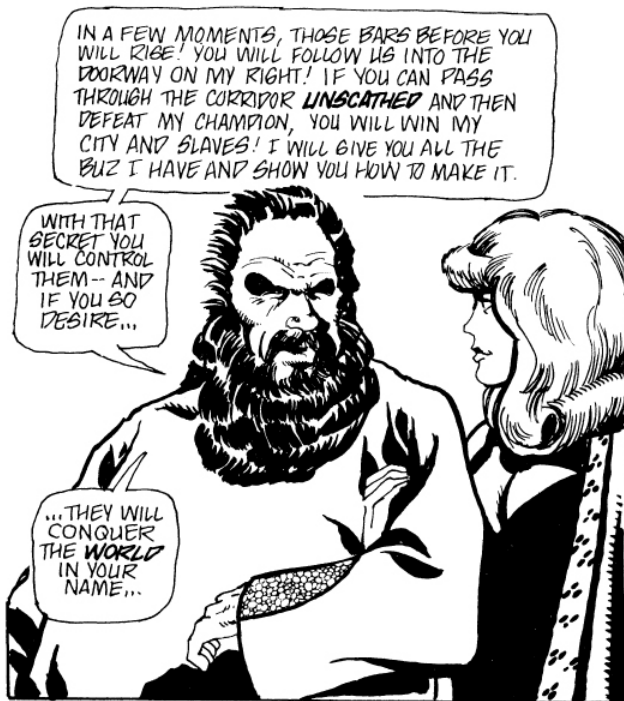


CAME IN AHEAD OF THEM, **EH?** JUST TO BE SURE! HM! I **LIKE** THAT! A COURAGEOUS KING -- AS I AM A COURAGEOUS **DEMI-GOD!**

WE ARE **ADMIRABLE** FIGURES, YOU AND I!



SO, YOU HAVE COME TO TAKE MY CITY AND MY **SLAVES** FROM ME! VERY WELL -- I AM A FAIR KING -- YOU WILL HAVE YOUR CHANCE TO TAKE MY CITY AND MY SLAVES FOR YOUR OWN! I PROPOSE A WAGER OF **KINGS!** A **KINGLY** CHALLENGE FOR **KINGLY** STAKES...



PLUNGING INTO THE BLACKNESS, CEREBUS ALREADY **SUSPECTS** WHAT MANNER OF RECEPTION K'COR HAS PREPARED...

...AND IN THE NEXT INSTANT HE IS PROVEN RIGHT HOVERING IN THE BLACKNESS ARE THE FADED ENERGY GLOBES OF IMESH. ON A FOOLISH WAGER CEREBUS HAD FACED THEM IN HIS YOUTH... AT THAT TIME, HE HAD BEEN TRAINED BY THE AGING MAGICIAN WHO HAD **CONJURED** THEM...

"THE GLOBES FLARE BRIEFLY BEFORE STRIKING, YOUNG CEREBUS! WATCH THEM AND RESPOND **QUICKLY!** KEEP THE SWORD BETWEEN YOU AND THE GLOBES, AT ALL TIMES..."

"THE ENERGY IS ABSORBED BY METAL, AND IT TAKES THE GLOBES SEVERAL SECONDS TO **RECHARGE!** KEEP TRACK OF THEM AS BEST YOU CAN! THE GLOBES DO NOT THINK BUT YOU **DO!**"

"A CONTINUOUS CIRCLING MOTION IS THE BEST! COMBINE IT WITH SHORT STEPS FORWARD! REMEMBER YOU AREN'T SAFE UNTIL YOU ARE **COMPLETELY** PAST THEM AND YOU ARE LOST IF THEY MANAGE TO DRIVE YOU BACKWARDS..."

THOUGH HIS COORDINATION IS **BETTER**, THOUGH HE IS FASTER THAN HE WAS IN THOSE DAYS LONG GONE, CEREBUS REALIZES THAT HE HAD BEEN FULLY RESTED FOR HIS FIRST ORDEAL! HE CAN FEEL THE MILES CATCHING UP TO HIM...

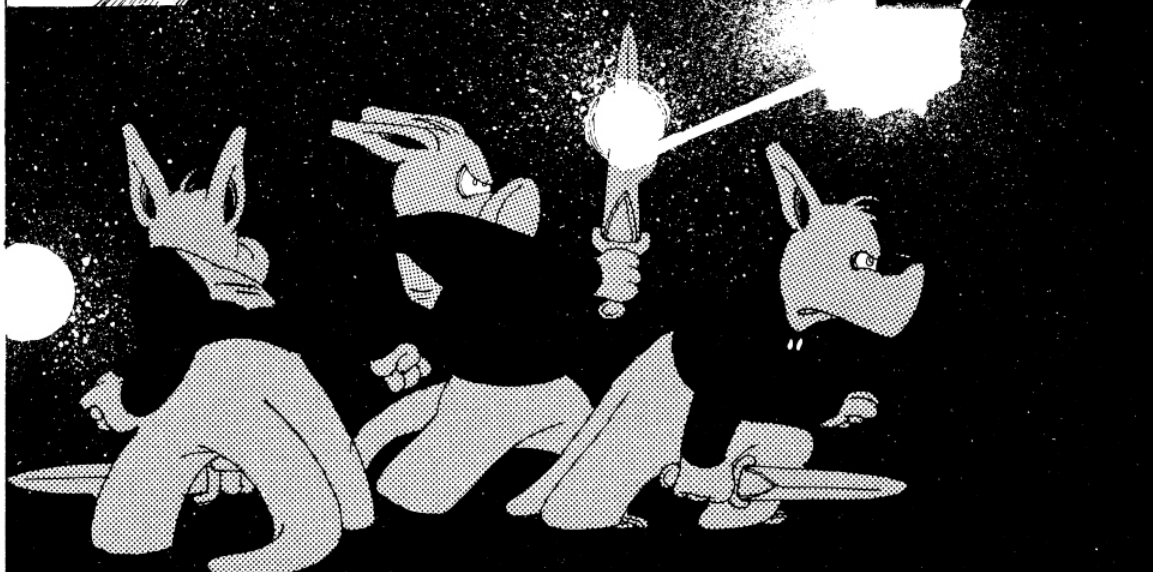
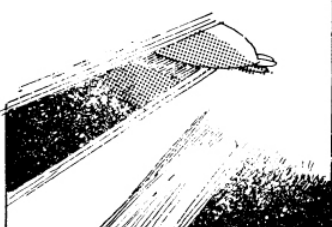


AND, SUDDENLY, HIS WORST FEARS ARE REALIZED...

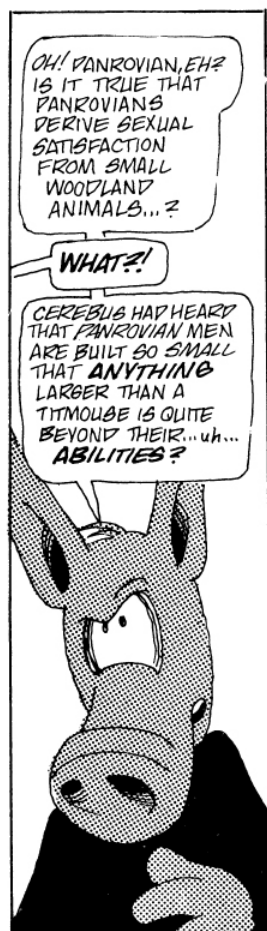


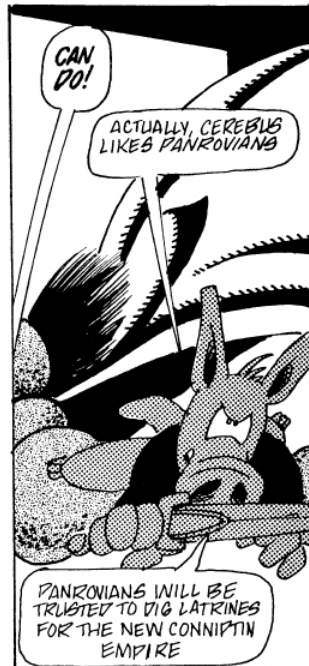
EVEN AS THE EXPLOSION OF PAIN SENDS HIM TO HIS KNEES...

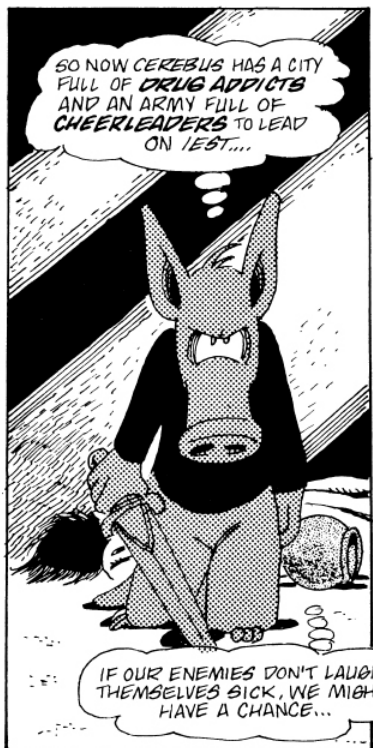
IT IS INSTINCT, MORE THAN SKILL THAT SAVES HIM, HIS SWORD RISING...



HE CURSES THE FATES FOR HIS SLOW-HEALING BACK WOUND, REOPENED BY THE GLOBE... HE IS PAST THE GLOBES, EXHAUSTION FEEDING ON EVERY FIBRE OF HIS BEING! BLINKING THE SWEAT FROM HIS EYES, HE SCANS THE CORRIDOR BEFORE HIM...

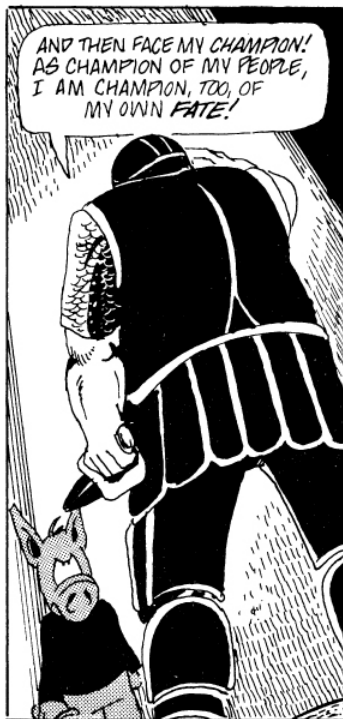








YOU SAY YOU HAVE FACED MY CHAMPION-- YOU HAVE **NOT!** I SAID YOU WOULD HAVE TO PASS THROUGH THE **CORRIDOR...**



AND THEN FACE MY CHAMPION! AS CHAMPION OF MY PEOPLE, I AM CHAMPION, TOO, OF MY OWN FATE!



WE HAVE MADE A **WAGER OF KINGS**. BUT I WILL TELL YOU SOMETHING OF **KINGS, YOUR MAJESTY...**

THEIR WAGERS USUALLY BECOME **BATTLES...**



...AND THEIR **BATTLES...**

... **WARS!**

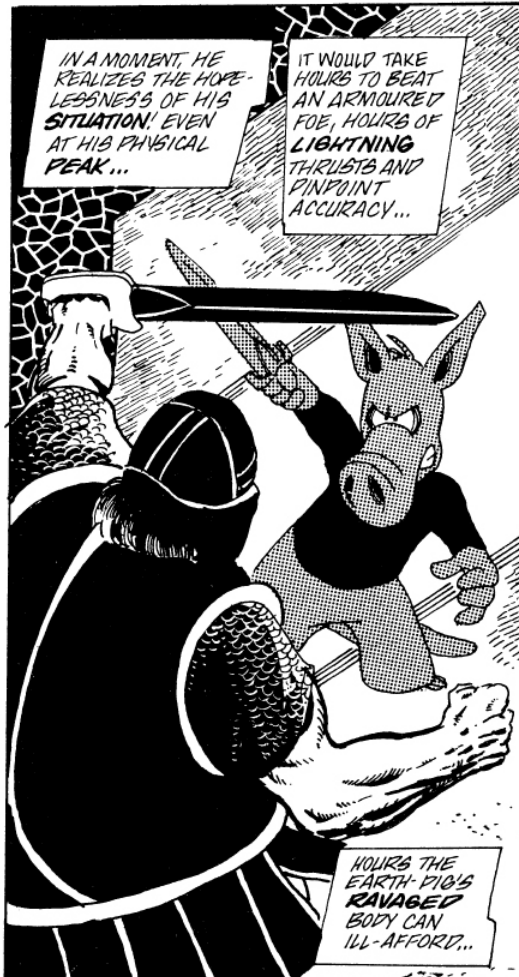
AND NOW, WE SHALL SETTLE OUR **WAGER...**

...AS **KINGS!**



CEREBUS STARES IN STUNNED DISBELIEF AT THE SHINING BLACK ARMOUR BEFORE HIM...

HE CAN FEEL THE ACHES IN HIS LIMBS! THE **THROBBING** THAT BLURS HIS VISION SIGNALS THE ONSET OF **PHYSICAL COLLAPSE...**



IN A MOMENT, HE REALIZES THE **HOPELESSNESS** OF HIS **SITUATION!** EVEN AT HIS **PHYSICAL PEAK...**

IT WOULD TAKE HOURS TO BEAT AN ARMoured FOE, HOURS OF **LIGHTNING** THRUSTS AND **PINPOINT** ACCURACY...

HOURS THE EARTH-DIG'S **RAVAGED** BODY CAN **ILL-AFFORD...**

THE SLASHING EDGE OF THE **BLACK SWORD** RISES AGAIN AND AGAIN IN THE EARTH PIG'S LINE OF SIGHT...

EACH MOVE IS CALCULATED, **POWERFUL!** "THIS BLUBBERY KING" THINKS THE AARDVARK, "IS NO MEAN, 'SWORDSMAN,'"



FACING ALMOST **CERTAIN** DEATH, THE AARDVARK'S BOWS BEGIN TO GROW LESS ACCURATE...

HE HAS BEEN WITHOUT SLEEP SINCE RISING THE TWO MORNINGS BEFORE AND FRUSTRATION AND DESPAIR EAT AWAY AT HIS SPIRIT...

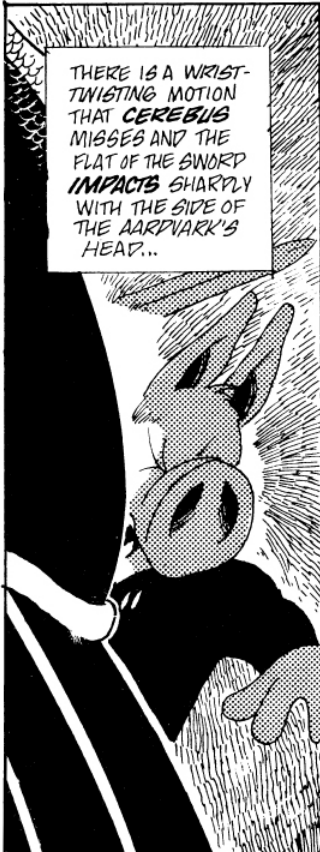


HE HAD SEEN MEN **FALTER** BEFORE HIM, RECOGNIZING THEIR IMMINENT DEFEAT...

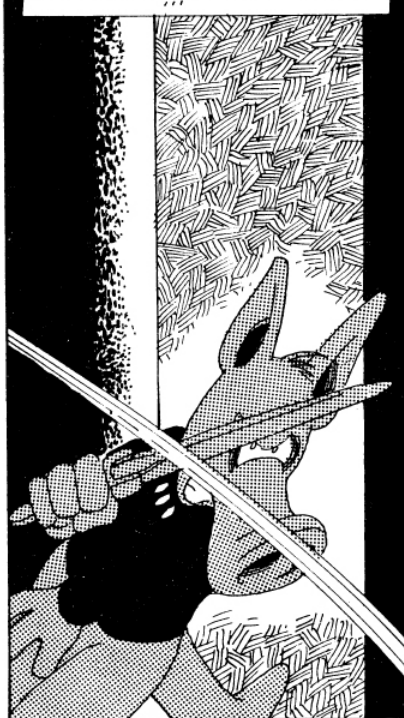
THEY HAD **RECOGNIZED** A HOPELESS SITUATION AS HE DID NOW...



THERE IS A WRIST-TWISTING MOTION THAT **CEREBUS** MISSES AND THE FLAT OF THE SWORD **IMPACTS** SHARPLY WITH THE SIDE OF THE AARDVARK'S HEAD...



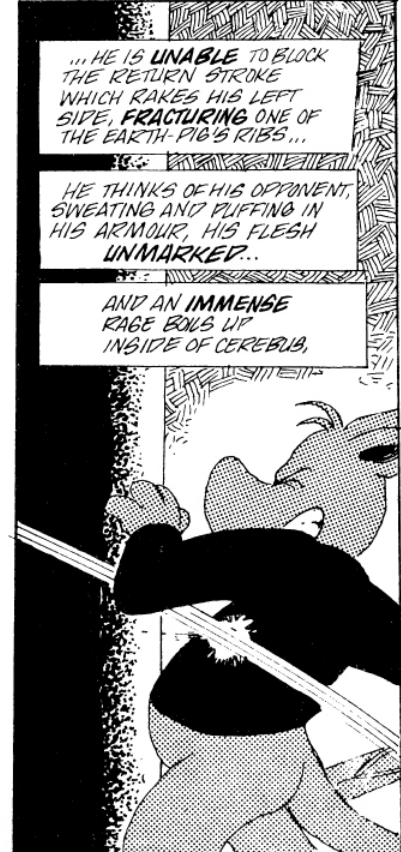
REELING **BACKWARD**, CEREBUS MANAGES TO RAISE HIS SWORD TO BLOCK A FATAL BLOW! IN REGAINING HIS BALANCE, HOWEVER...



... HE IS **UNABLE** TO BLOCK THE RETURN STROKE WHICH RAKES HIS LEFT SIDE, **FRACTURING** ONE OF THE EARTH-PIG'S RIBS...

HE THINKS OF HIS OPPONENT, SWEATING AND PUFFING IN HIS ARMOUR, HIS FLESH **UNMARKED**...

AND AN **IMMENSE** RAGE BOILS UP INSIDE OF CEREBUS,





HE SWINGS **WILDLY**, FEELS THE SWORD CATCH, BRIEFLY, THEN RIP... THERE IS A BLUR OF BLACK, RED AND GREY...



...AND SUDDENLY, K'COR HOLDS THE GREAT BLACK SWORD IN HIS RIGHT HAND...!



A SLOW GRIN CROSSES THE EARTH-FIG'S FACE AND HE **SALUTES** THE GESTURE -- CEREBUS HADN'T DEMANDED HIS OWN ARMOUR...

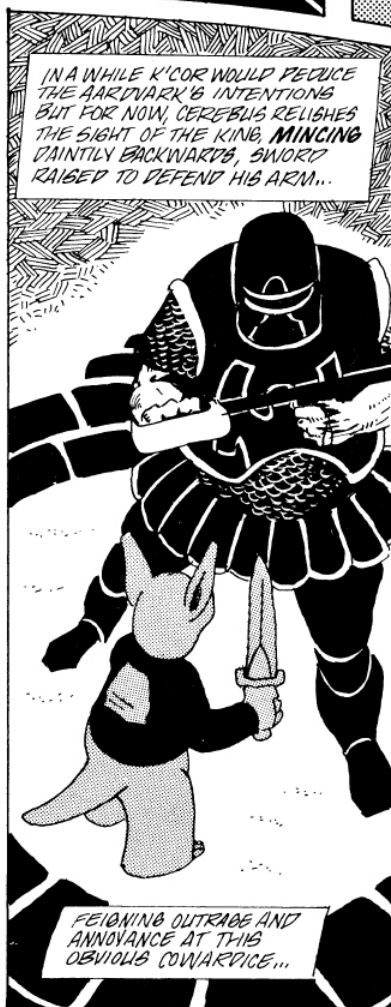
...K'COR WILL NOT DEMAND COMPENSATION FOR THE WOUND ON HIS HAND...



CEREBUS SEES THE KING IS **PLAGUED** BY DOUBT -- WONDERING IF CEREBUS COMES TO DO BATTLE -- OR MERELY TO WOUND HIS GOOD ARM...

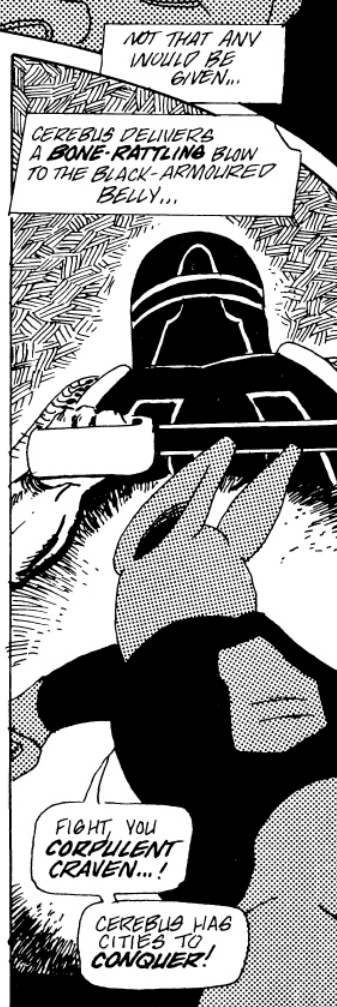
CEREBUS QUICKLY DECIDES TO LEAVE THE ARM ALONE! THE KING DOESN'T KNOW THAT, HOWEVER AND THE EARTH-FIG ADVANCES...

...SMILING.



IN A WHILE K'COR WOULD **REDUCE** THE AARDVARK'S INTENTIONS BUT FOR NOW, CEREBUS RELISHES THE SIGHT OF THE KING, **MINCING** DAINLY BACKWARDS, SWORD RAISED TO DEFEND HIS ARM...

FEIGNING OUTRAGE AND ANNOYANCE AT THIS OBVIOUS CONVICTION...



NOT THAT ANY WOULD BE GIVEN...

CEREBUS DELIVERS A **BONE-RATTLING** BLOW TO THE BLACK-ARMoured BELLY...

FIGHT, YOU **CORPULENT** CRAVEN...!

CEREBUS HAS CITIES TO **CONQUER**!

HE WOULD CARRY THE CONSPIRATORS ON HIS BACK IF NEED BE! THE WORLD HAD HAD ENOUGH OF FAT STRUTTING MONARCHS IN FANCY ARMOUR! A NEW EMPIRE WAS DAWNING...

K'COR CONTINUES HIS SWIF RETREAT AS CEREBUS POUNDS AT HIS BELLY...

THE NEW CONSPIRACY EMPIRE WOULD BE FORGED BY CHEERLEADERS AND DRUG ADDICTS -- PROSTITUTES AND DRUNKARDS -- AND ALL THE OTHERS WHO HAD BOWED TOO LONG TO INSANE DESPOTS...

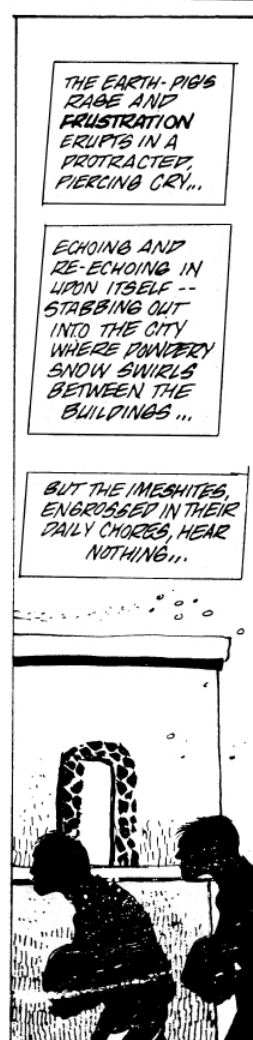
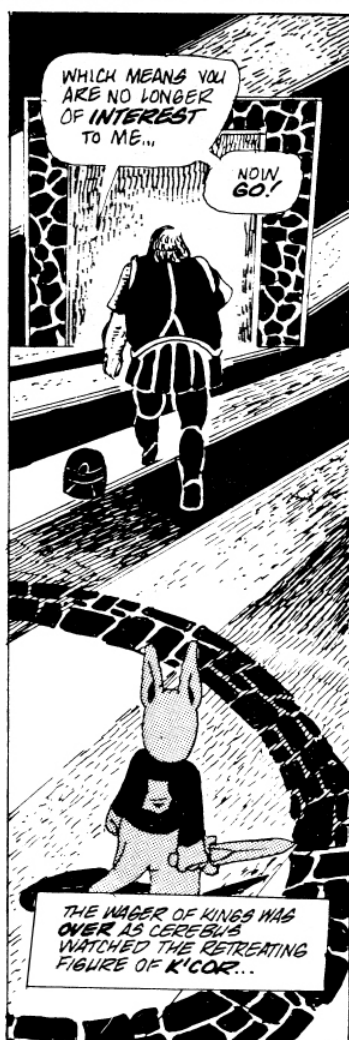
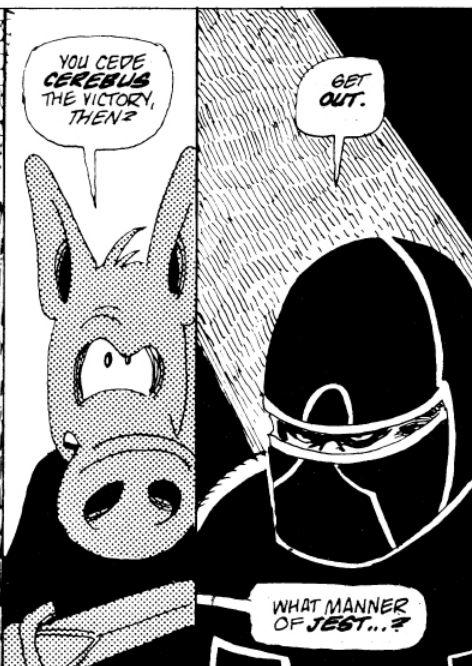
CEREBUS WAITS FOR K'COR TO TURN AND FIGHT -- IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME...

A NEW AGE WAS DAWNING WHEN MEN WOULD ONCE MORE BE MEASURED BY THEIR SWORDS -- A NEW GOLDEN AGE OF WARRIORS!

AND CEREBUS WOULD LEAD THOSE WARRIORS ON GREAT AND GLORIOUS CRUSADES! HIS MEN WOULD BE ENGAGED IN THE NOBLEST OF ALL POSSIBLE PURSUITS...

...ENDLESS PILLAGING, DRINKING AND FIGHTING IN THE NAME OF CEREBUS THE KING...

STUNG BY THE LAST BLOW, K'COR RETREATS SEVERAL STEPS AND THEN PAUSES...



MERCHANT OF UNSHIB!

IT IS THE SEVENTH DAY OF THE BLIZZARD! SINCE IT HAD STRUCK WITHOUT WARNING A WEEK BEFORE, TRAVEL HAD GROUND TO A HALT AND FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE HAD DIED OF EXPOSURE IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF IEST

UNAWARE OF THIS, CEREBUS PUSHES RESOLUTELY SOUTHWARD, ASSURING HIMSELF THAT IEST HAS ESCAPED THE POLAR SNOWS AND FREEZING WINDS...

HIS LEGS, PISTON-LIKE, CHURN THE POWDER-WHITE SNOW. THE FOOTPRINTS SEEM TO GROW FAINTER WITH EACH PASSING MILE, AND AN EMPTY PACK AND GROWLING STOMACH SERVE TO REMIND THE EARTH-PIG OF THE URGENCY OF HIS HUNT...

THERE IS A HANDFUL OF
SCRAPS IN THE AARDVARK'S
PACK, ENOUGH, HE REALIZES
TO SUSTAIN HIM FOR
PERHAPS HALF A DAY...



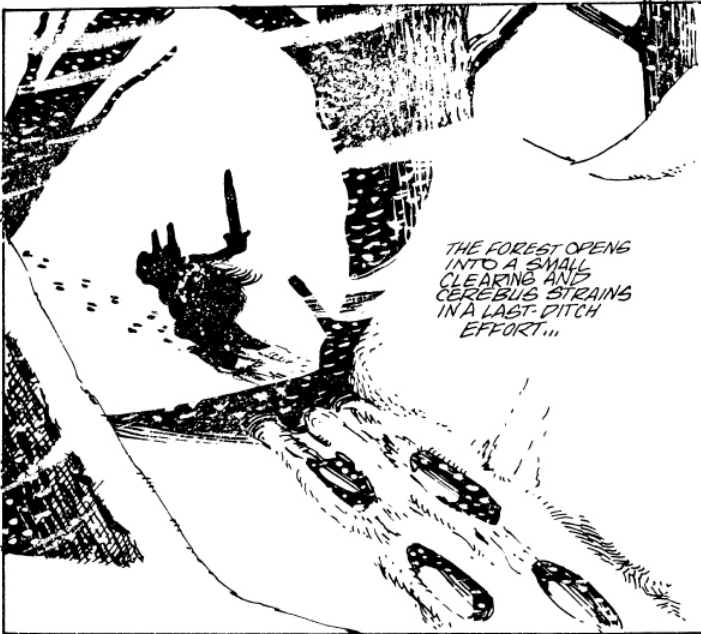
THE SNOW HAD DRIVEN
MOST OF THE ANIMALS
TO SHELTER, HIS KILLS
HAD BECOME MORE
INFREQUENT...

CEREBUS WINCES AS HE LOSES
HIS FOOTING AND FEELS THE
PAINFUL TUG ON HIS RIBS.
THE FRACTURES HAD BEGUN
TO HEAL, BUT WERE STILL
SENSITIVE...



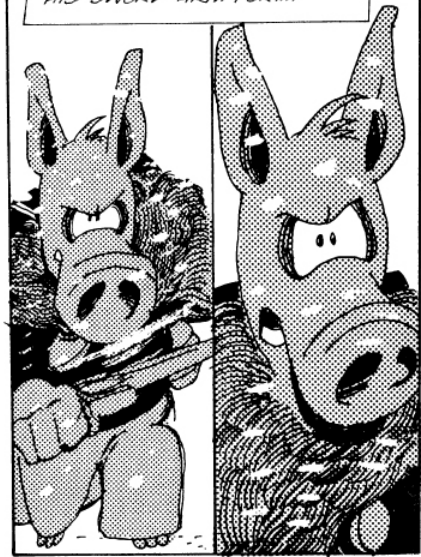
THOUGH DIZZY FROM THE
PAIN, HE PRESSES ON...
SUCH WAS THE NATURE
OF THE STRUGGLE FOR
SURVIVAL, CEREBUS
KNEW...

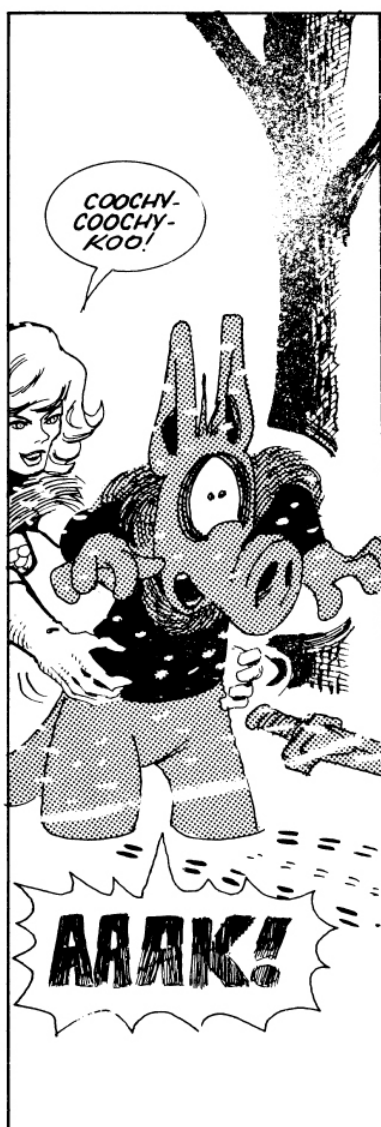
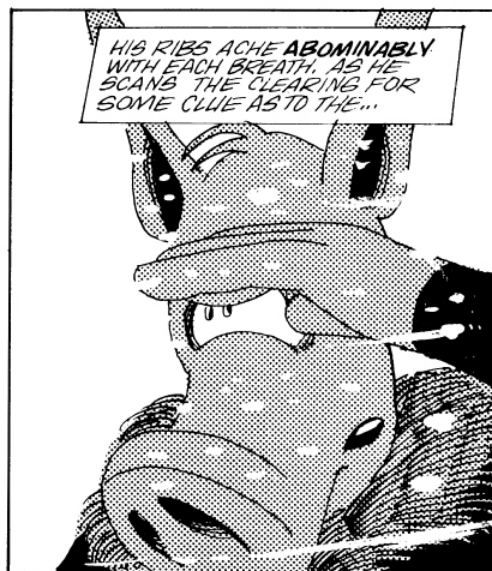
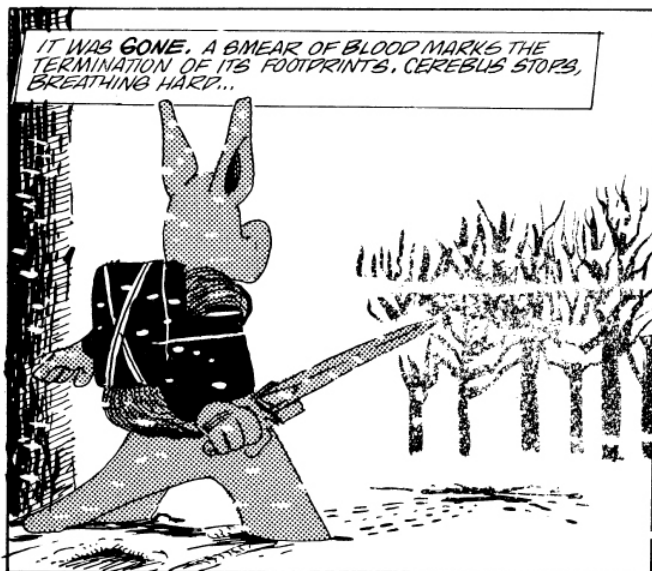
...THAT OFTEN THE
OUTCOME OF THE STRUGGLE
WOULD HINGE ON JUST
SUCH AN ACHE OR
PAIN.

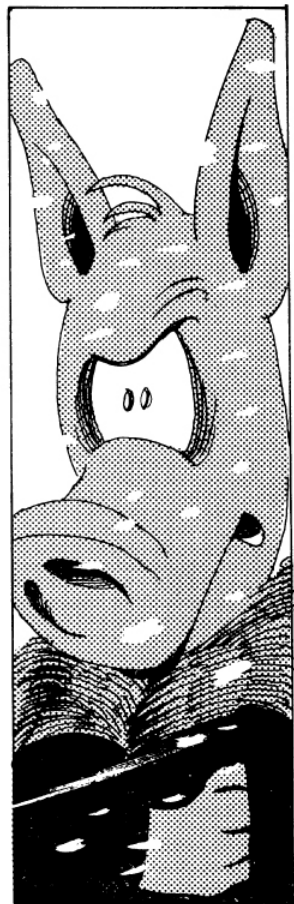
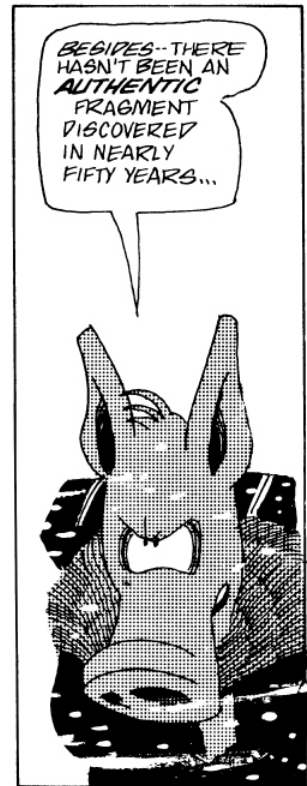


THE FOREST OPENS
INTO A SMALL
CLEARING AND
CEREBUS STRAINS
IN A LAST-DITCH
EFFORT...

THE CHASE WAS NEARLY OVER
AND CEREBUS READIES
HIS SWORD ARM FOR...







THE BLACK BLOSSOM LOTUS A POWERFUL MAGIC TALISMAN, CREATED BY THE WIZARD **HERCES** TO HONOUR THE GOD-KING OF AMSTANAT ON THE OCCASION OF HIS CORONATION! AT THE TIME OF THE RELIGIOUS WARS IN AMSTANAT, THE GRAND VIZIER HAD IT MOVED TO **ESHNOSOPUR** FOR SAFE-KEEPING. WHEN IT FAILED TO ARRIVE AT ITS DESTINATION, SUSPICION FELL ON THE CAPTAIN OF THE CARAVAN! HE DIED IN PRISON, STILL MAINTAINING HIS INNOCENCE! FIVE BLACK FRAGMENTS, PURPORTED TO BE PARTS OF THE MISSING LOTUS SURFACED IN THE SOUTH, SOME TWENTY TO FORTY YEARS LATER.

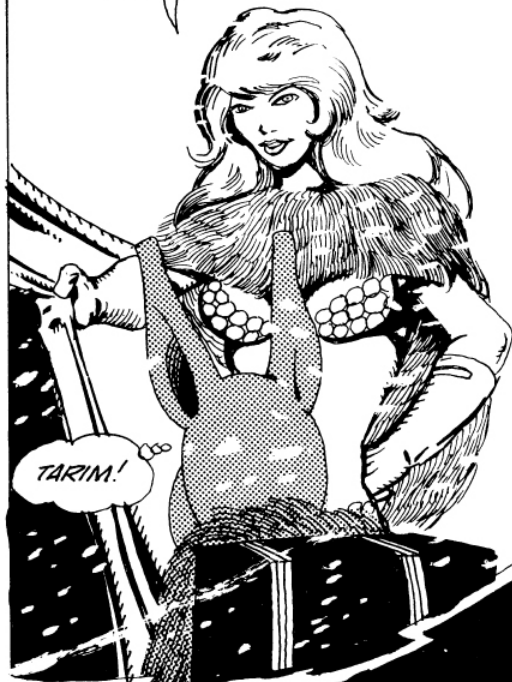
I MARRIED **FERAS** LIKE YOU TOLD ME TO... BUT HE FORGOT THAT **SOPHIA** WILL ONLY GIVE HERSELF TO ONE WHO HAS DEFEATED HER IN BATTLE! ON OUR FIRST ANNIVERSARY HE DIED OF EIGHT COMPOUND FRACTURES, TWELVE STAB WOUNDS AND AN **ULCER**...

I PUNCHED HIM IN THE JAW ONE LAST TIME, AND HE PASSED FROM THIS WORLD

YES BUT THE **LOTUS**-- YOU SAY THAT THERE IS...



NOW, NOW! YOU KNOW **RED SOPHIA** WELL ENOUGH-- WITH ME IT'S ALWAYS PLEASURE BEFORE BUSINESS...

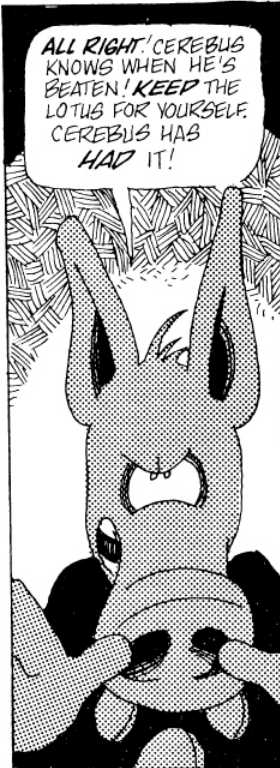


TARIM!

JUST MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE! I'LL BE BACK IN A FEW MINUTES WITH A JUG OF WINE!

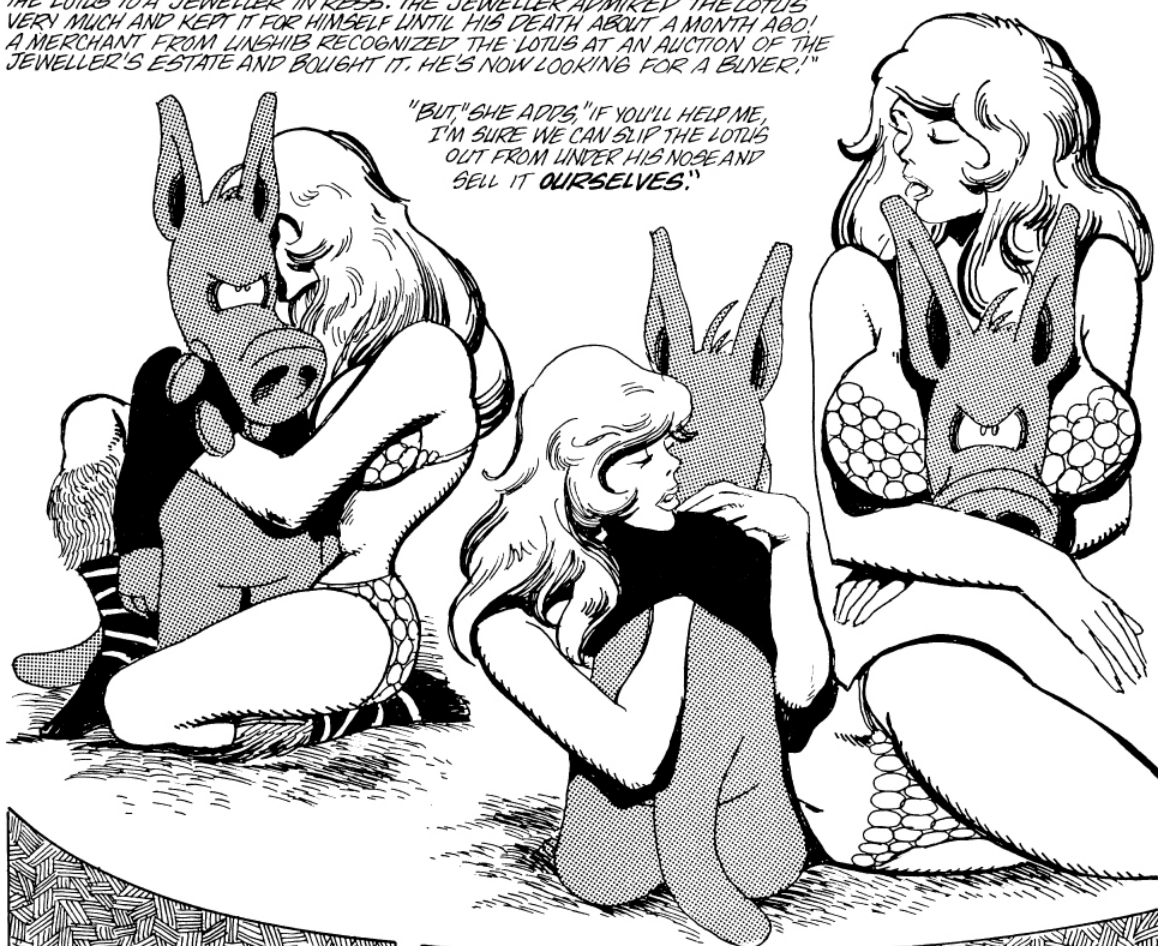


WHY DO THESE THINGS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO **CEREBUS**?



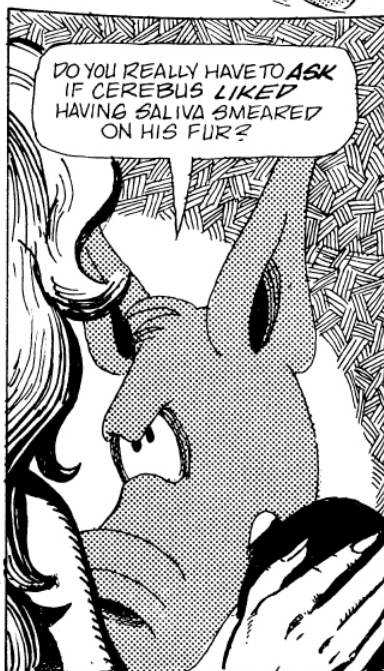
"THE LEGEND IS ACCURATE UP TO THE POINT WHERE THE GRAND VIZIER SHIPS THE LOTUS TO ESHNOSOPHUR-- IN ACTUAL FACT, HE HAD A DUPLICATE MADE AND SHIPPED THAT IN ITS PLACE. THE CAPTAIN OF THE CARAVAN WAS INNOCENT OF THE CHARGES," SOPHIA SAYS. "HOWEVER, THE VIZIER WAS WAYLAIED BY THIEVES ON HIS WAY TO SELL THE STOLEN LOTUS; THE THIEVES, NOT KNOWING WHAT THEY HAD SOLD THE LOTUS TO A JEWELLER IN RESS. THE JEWELLER ADMIRKED THE LOTUS VERY MUCH AND KEPT IT FOR HIMSELF UNTIL HIS DEATH ABOUT A MONTH AGO! A MERCHANT FROM LINGHIB RECOGNIZED THE LOTUS AT AN AUCTION OF THE JEWELLER'S ESTATE AND BOUGHT IT. HE'S NOW LOOKING FOR A BUYER!"

"BUT," SHE ADDS, "IF YOU'LL HELP ME, I'M SURE WE CAN SLIP THE LOTUS OUT FROM UNDER HIS NOSE AND SELL IT OURSELVES."



WELL?

DID YOU LIKE IT?



DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO ASK IF CEREBUS LIKED HAVING SALIVA SMEARED ON HIS FUR?



THIS IS GOING TO BE A LOT TOUGHER THAN I THOUGHT.





WHAT TREACHERY
IS THIS, THEN?



A SCUM-SUCKING SAWED-OFF KHAIVEN!
YOU CAN'T TAKE OVER OUR COUNTRY BY
FORCE, SO YOU HOUND US IN OTHER
LANDS!

CEREBUS--
THIS IS MEIRGEN...
HE GETS THE THIRD
SHARE.



MEIRGEN-- SAY HELLO
TO CEREBUS THE
AARDVARK...

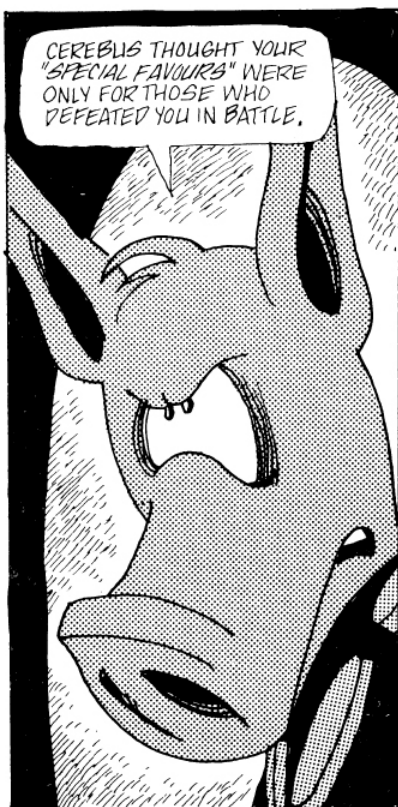
I'LL FEED YOUR HEART
TO THE WOLVES, YOU
STINKING KHAIVEN
SCUM!

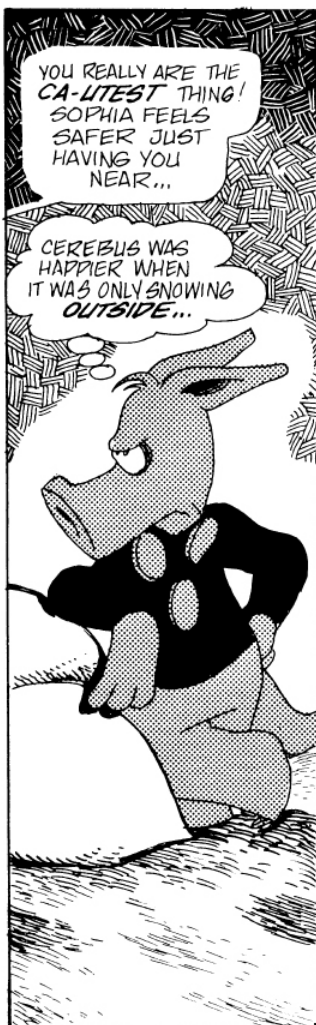


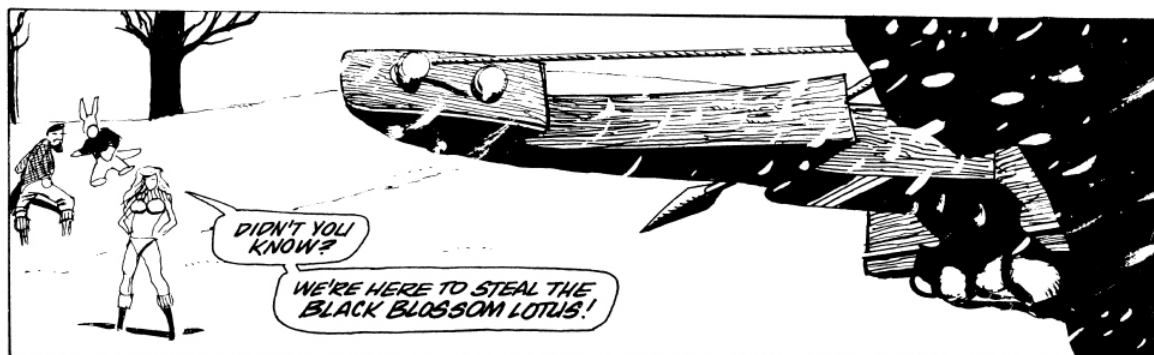
AND YOU, SOPHIA-- SENDING
MEIRGEN OUT TO CHECK THE
CARAVAN-- WHILE YOU...
LINGER... HERE WITH
THAT-- THAT SCUM-
SLICKING...

"...SAWED-
OFF KHAIVEN."
I HEARD YOU
THE FIRST
TIME.









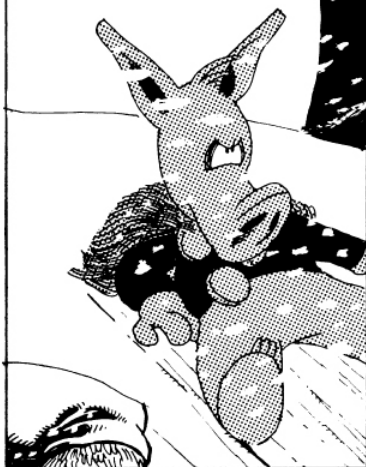
WELL, I GUESS NOW I HAVE TO
BRIBE YOU. JOIN US AND WE'LL
GIVE YOU A FULL SHARE ---
TEN GOLD PIECES!



THE GUARD, WHO HAD ALREADY
SOLD HIS LOYALTIES FOR EIGHT
COPPER COINS, PAUSES AND HIS
BROW DEVELOPS DEEP FURROWS.

IT WOULD MEAN LESS MONEY
PER SHARE, BUT CEREBUS
DID NOT RELISH THE IDEA
OF QUARRELING WITH
THE TCAPMIN...

THE BORDER GUARDS
WERE KNOWN FOR
THEIR HAIR-TRIGGER
REFLEXES AND
TEMPERS...



A SLOW GRIN SPLITS THE
FEATURES OF THE GRIM
BLONDE NORTHLANDER



TELL ME YOUR
PLAN! IF I THINK
IT WILL WORK
I WILL JOIN.

OKAY! THIS IS
OUR ONLY CHANCE
TO KEEP A SHARE
OF THE LOTUS!
MAKE IT A GOOD
PLAN...

CEREBUS
THOUGHT YOU
HAD A PLAN!



I HAD PLANNED TO TAKE
THE GUARDS BY SURPRISE
AND OVERPOWER THEM
WHILE THEY SLEPT...

SOMEHOW I DON'T
THINK HE'LL HAVE
TOO MUCH FAITH
IN THAT IDEA...



WELL?

LET'S HEAR
YOUR DAMN
PLAN!



CEREBUS RISES SLOWLY-- HIS EYES FIXED ON THE TCAPMIN'S! HIS MIND RACES, SIFTING THROUGH ALL HE KNOWS OF THE BORDER GUARDS. THE CROSSBOW FOLLOWS HIS RISE...

...THE POINT OF ITS ARROW AIMED DIRECTLY AT THE EARTH-PIG'S CHEST...

JUST DON'T MAKE HIM ANGRY...

CEREBUS WILL DO HIS BEST...

WHEN THEY ARE ALL ON ONE BRIDGE, WE PLAN TO RIP OUT A FEW STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS...

...AND PICK THE LOTUS OUT OF THE RUBBLE THAT LANDS AT THE BOTTOM...

THE TCAPMIN GUARDS ARE DEFENDERS! IN TRANSIT, THEY DEFEND EACH OTHER! IT IS SAID TO TAKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING TO MAKE THEM BREAK RANKS.

WE BOTH KNOW ALL THAT...

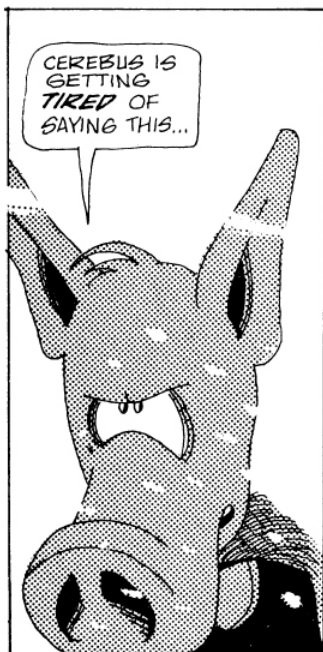
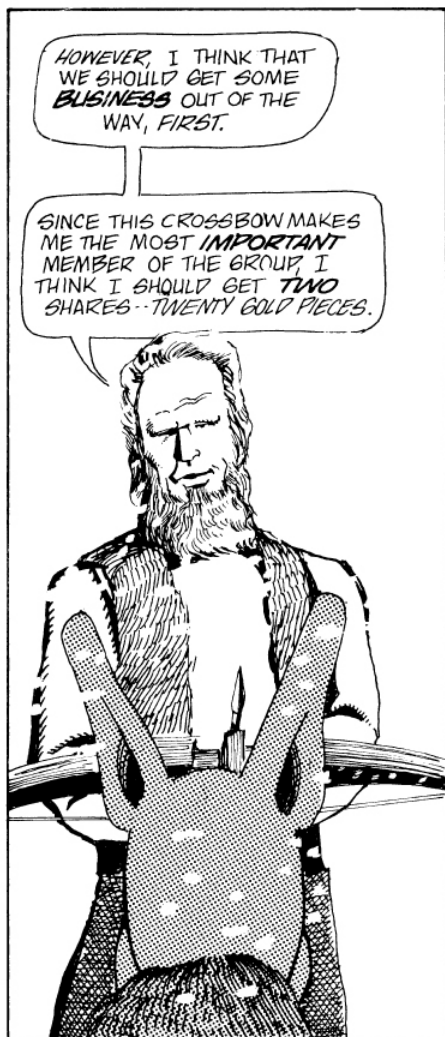
BUT-- IT MEANS THEY WILL BE CROSSING BRIDGES AS A UNIT!

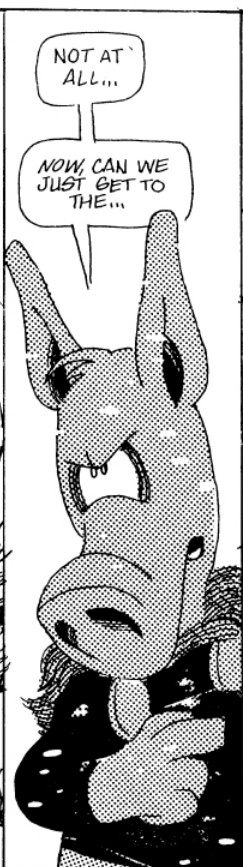
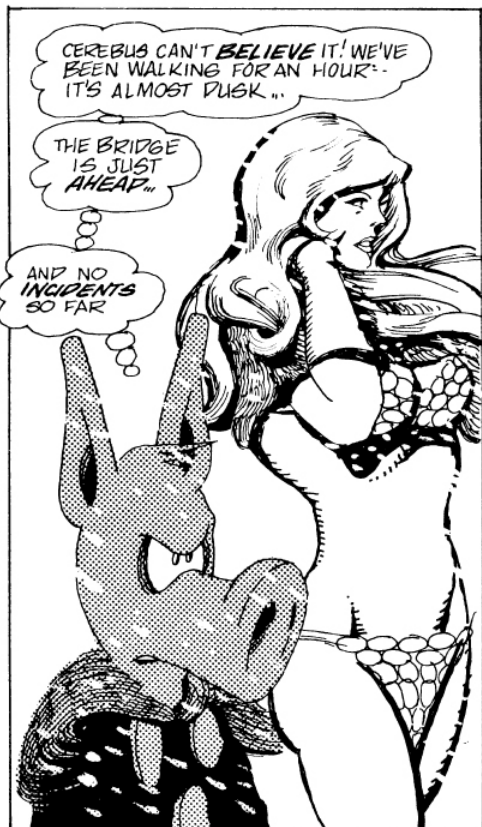
HAHAHAHAHAH! LONG-EARS-- I LIKE YOUR STYLE!

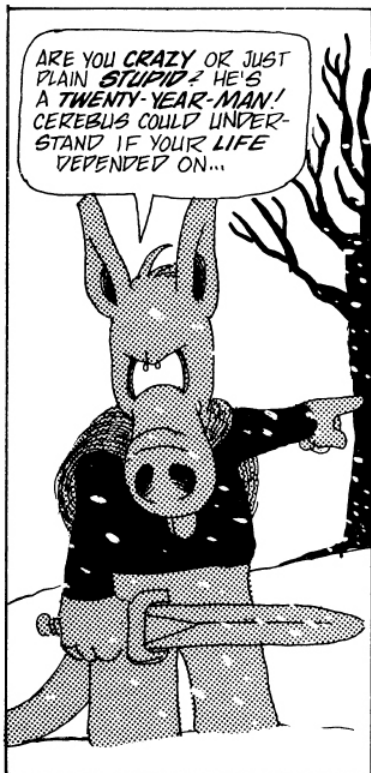
YOU'VE GOT A NEW RECRUIT!

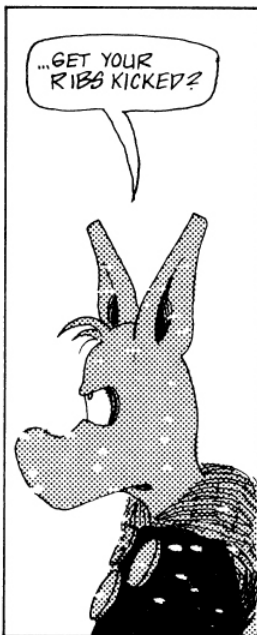
MEIRGEN AND SOPHIA AWAIT THE VERDICT WITH BATED BREATH...

PLEASE! KILL HIM, BUT LET ME GO! OH-PLEASE-PLEASE!











CEREBUS HAS BEEN THINKING THAT **ONE** OF US SHOULD DOUBLE BACK, AND WATCH THE CARAVAN! THE **TCAPMINS** ARE LIKELY TO TRY MOVING AT NIGHT JUST TO KEEP ANYONE, WITH THEIR EYE ON THE **LOTUS**, OFF THEIR GUARD...

A GOOD IDEA! WHICH ONE OF US?

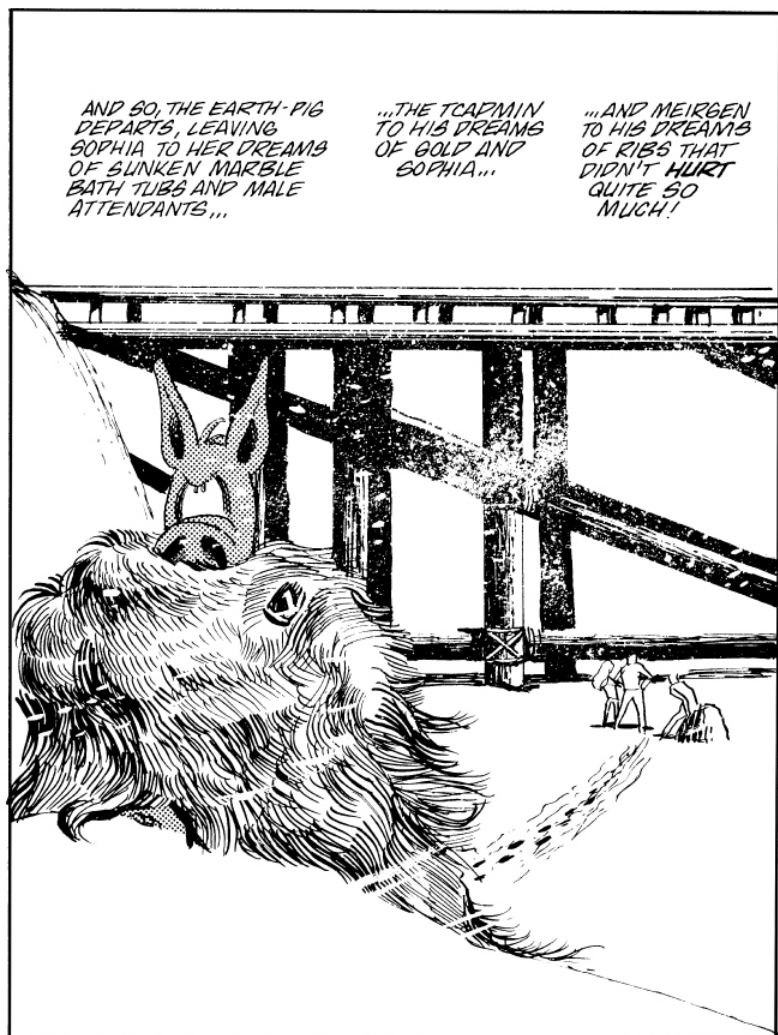
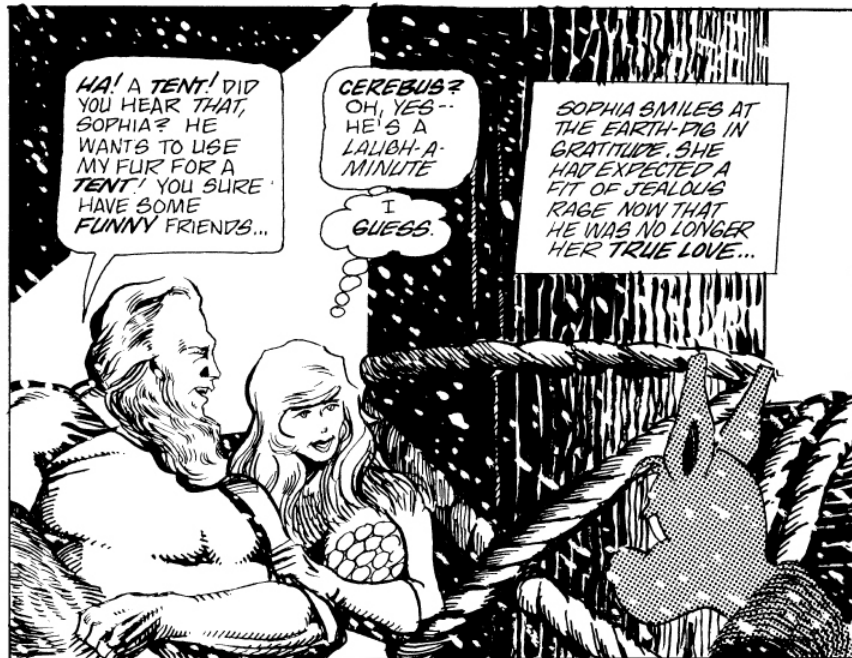
WELL, YOU LOOK LIKE THE BEST CHOICE TO ME FOR CHOPPING THROUGH THOSE BEAMS WITH A HEAVY SWORD... SO YOU SHOULD STAY HERE!

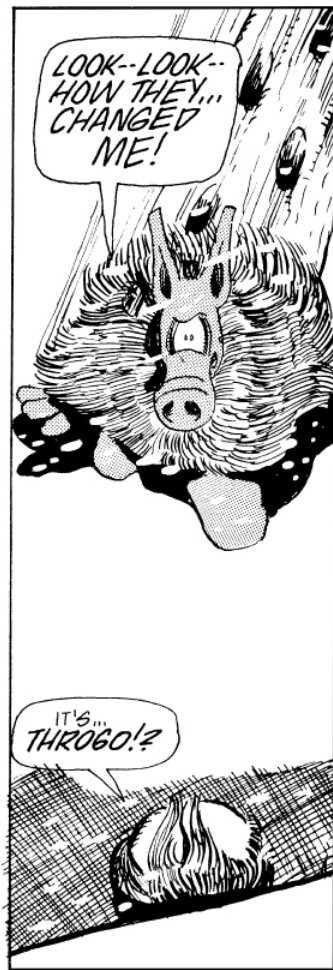
MEIRGEN? HE'S GOING TO HAVE HIS HANDS FULL JUST TRYING TO HEAL!

WHAT ABOUT THE **WIMP**, THEN?

HAH!

YOU ARE ONE IN-A-MILLION, **LONG-EARS!** WE'LL SEE YOU BACK HERE IN A WHILE!







HELLO-- I'M *CEREBUS THE AARDVARK*. YOU HAVE EXACTLY FOUR SECONDS TO HAND OVER THE *BLACK BLOSSOM LOTUS*...

AND YOU'VE JUST USED UP *THREE* OF THEM...



HAVE A NICE TRIP BACK TO *UNSHIB*...



NOW, IF *CEREBUS* COULD ONLY SEE THE LOOK ON *THROGO*'S FACE WHEN HIS COMRADES SWOOP DOWN ON HIM...

...IT WOULDN'T BE A HALF-BAD DAY...

THE MERCHANT THE COCKROACH

CEREBUS HARBOURED THE BELIEF THAT
BEDUIN EPI TOMIZED THE **WORST**
ASPECTS OF LOWER FELDA. ONLY IN
BEDUIN COULD YOU DEBATE PHILOSOPHY
WITH A SOLDIER BY DAY...

AND BY NIGHT, AWAKE TO
FIND HIM CARVING A
NEW MOUTH UNDER YOUR
CHIN... THE CITY ALSO FAIRLY
REEKED OF WINE AND
PERFUME...

HE ALMOST WISHED HIS COMPANION
WAS LEADING HIM INTO A TRAP SO
HE COULD VENT HIS RAGE! BUT FIRST
HE HAD TO SEE IF THE MERCHANT
WAS SERIOUS ABOUT THE HUNDRED
GOLD COINS...



I HOPE FOR BOTH OUR SAKES THAT YOU HAVEN'T STUMBLERD ACROSS A **FAKE**. IN THE PAST WEEK ALONE I'VE BOUGHT MEALS FOR A **DOZEN** BAR PATRONS CLAIMING TO POSSESS **AUTHENTIC** MAGIC CHARMS

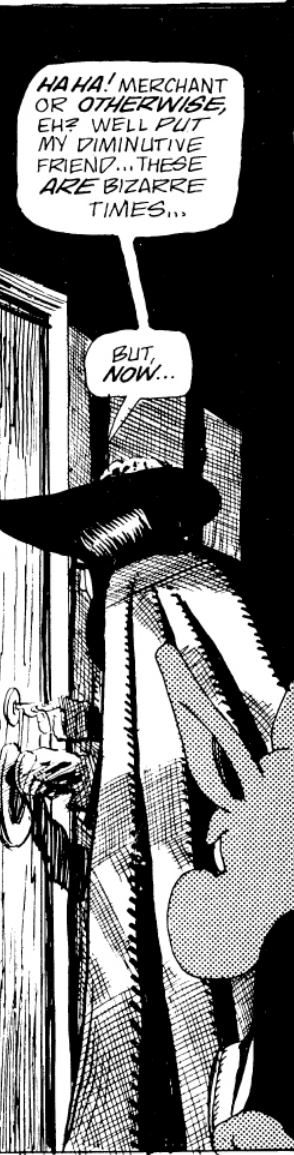
I'VE TOYED WITH THE IDEA OF OPENING A SPARE PARTS CLINIC FOR **LIZARDS, BATS** AND **RABBITS**...

WHY DO YOU KEEP LOOKING AROUND?



THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF INCIDENTS OF **VIOLENCE** IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD. A MERCHANT MUST BE **CONSTANTLY** ON HIS GUARD...

CEREBUS HAS YET TO MEET A MAN WHO **DIDN'T**...



HA HA! MERCHANT OR OTHERWISE, EH? WELL PUT MY DIMINUTIVE FRIEND... THESE ARE BIZARRE TIMES...

BUT, NOW...

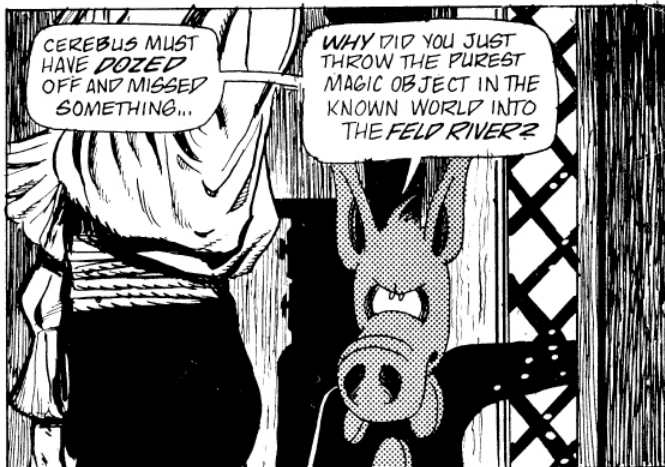
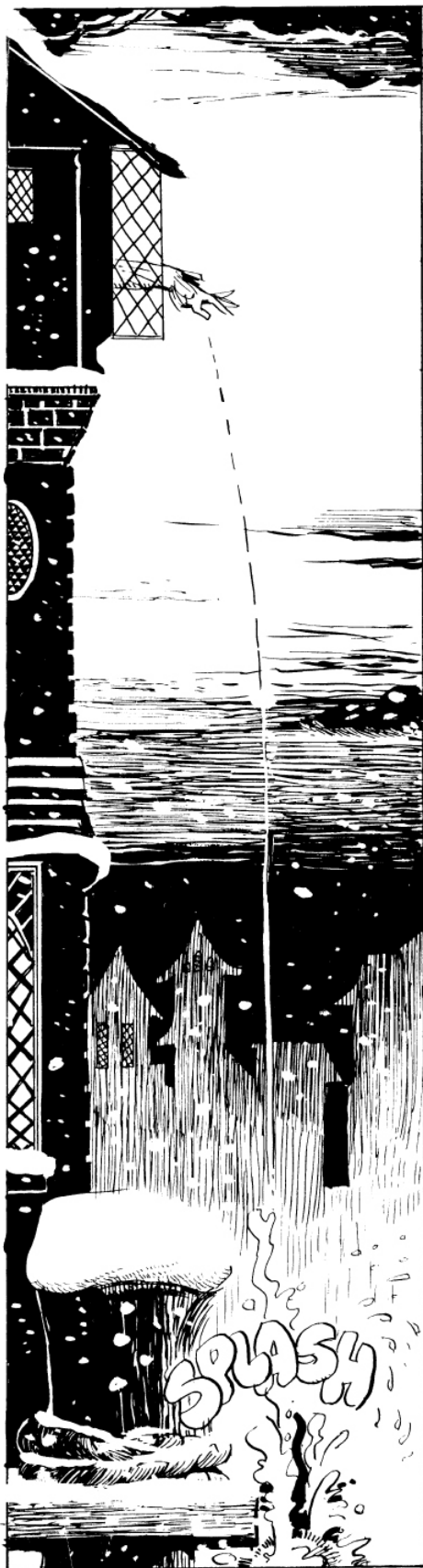


I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE YOUR '**LOTUS**'...



AYE! IT IS THE **LOTUS**-- AND A BARGAIN AT A **HUNDRED GOLD PIECES!** PROBABLY THE PUREST MAGIC OBJECT IN THE KNOWN WORLD.

THERE IS BUT **ONE** THING CAN BE DONE WITH IT...



CEREBUS MUST HAVE **DOZED** OFF AND MISSED SOMETHING...

WHY DID YOU JUST THROW THE PUREST MAGIC OBJECT IN THE KNOWN WORLD INTO THE FELD RIVER?



I AM A SORCERER TURNED **BUSINESSMAN!** THE MYSTIC ARTS ARE DYING, AND THOSE LEFT IN IT ARE BUFFOONS IN NECROMANCERS CLOTHING! WERE THEY TO GET THEIR HANDS ON THE LOTUS, THESE DIME-A-DOZEN ILLUSIONISTS COULD WREAK **HAVOC**, TOPPLE EMPIRES AND BRING US **ALL** TO CRASHING RUIN...



IT IS MY ROLE-- MAY-- MY DUTY IN LIFE TO BUY ALL MYSTIC OBJECTS IN FELDA AND DISPOSE OF THEM! I WILL PERMIT NO ATTEMPTS TO UNSTEADY THE SOCIAL ORDER--

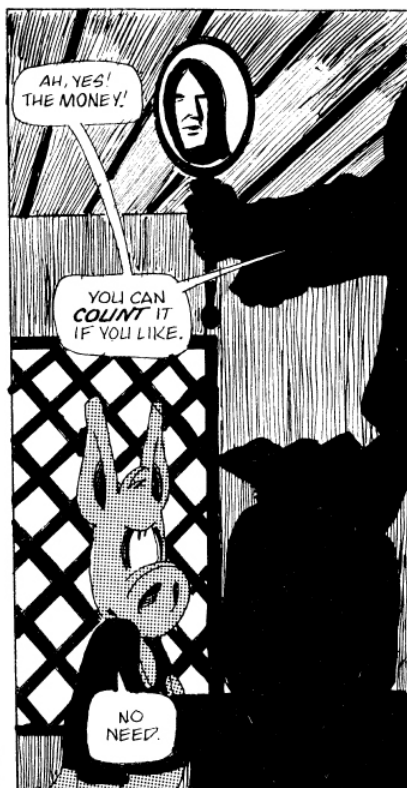
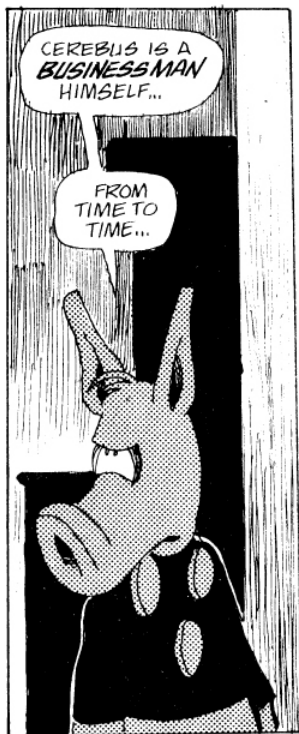
IT'S BAD FOR **BUSINESS**...

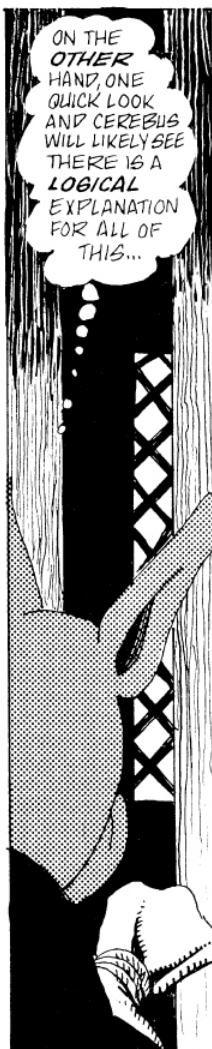
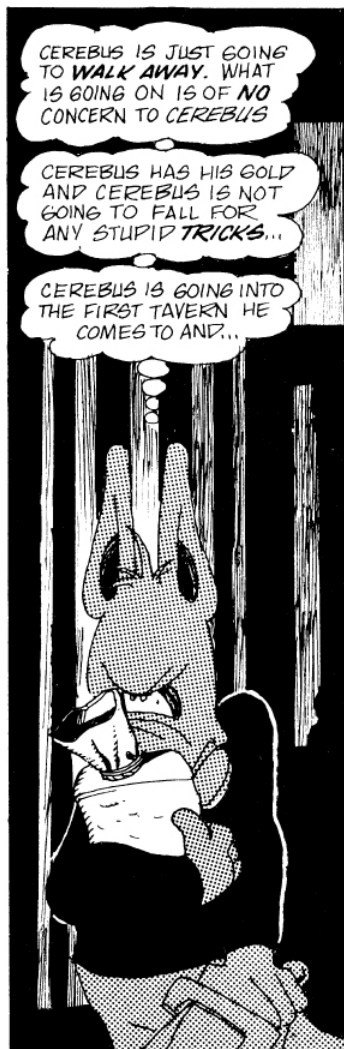
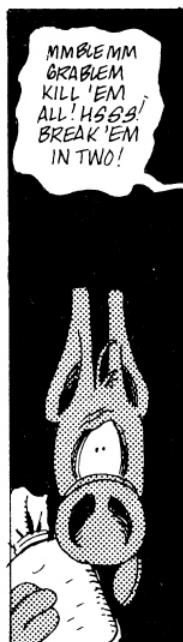
AND AS I SAID-- I'M A BUSINESSMAN



YOU WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO SEE MY **WRINKLE CREAM** OVER THERE WOULD YOU?

A LITTLE PINK JAR.





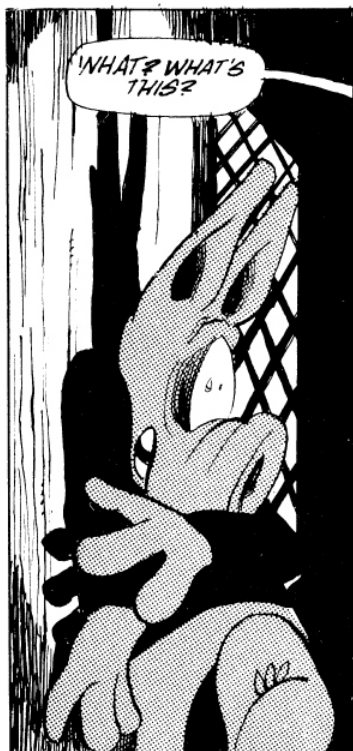


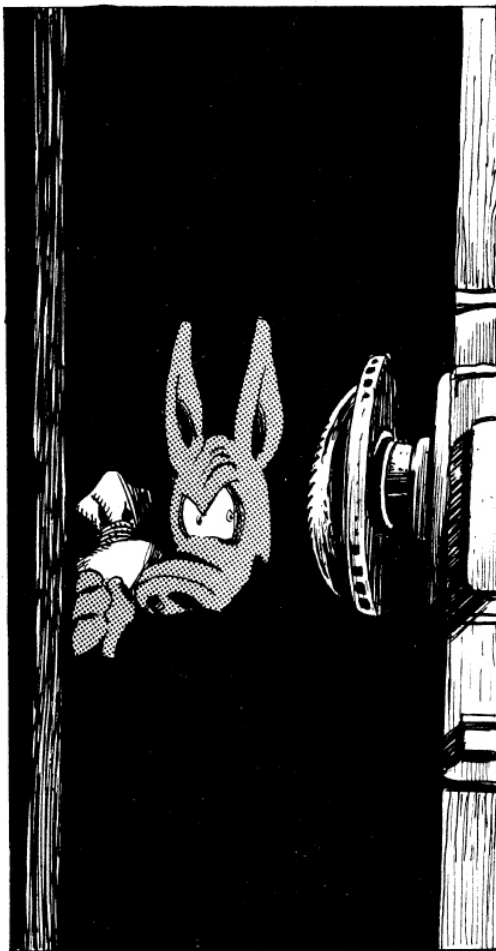


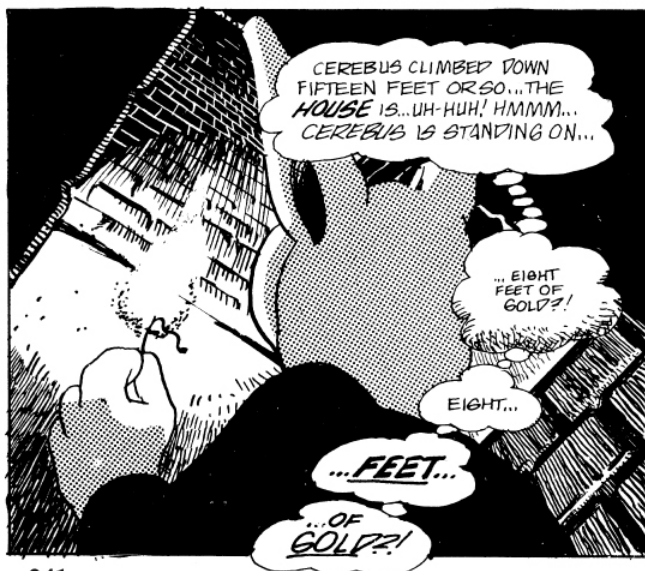
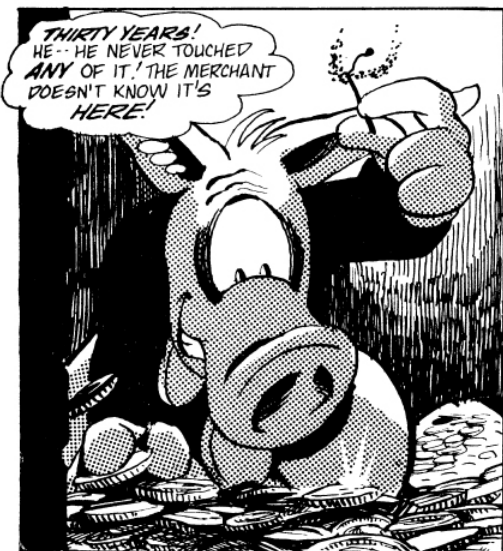


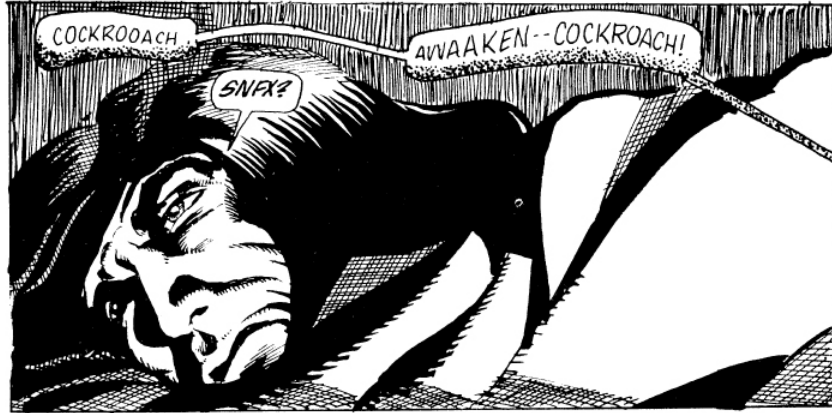




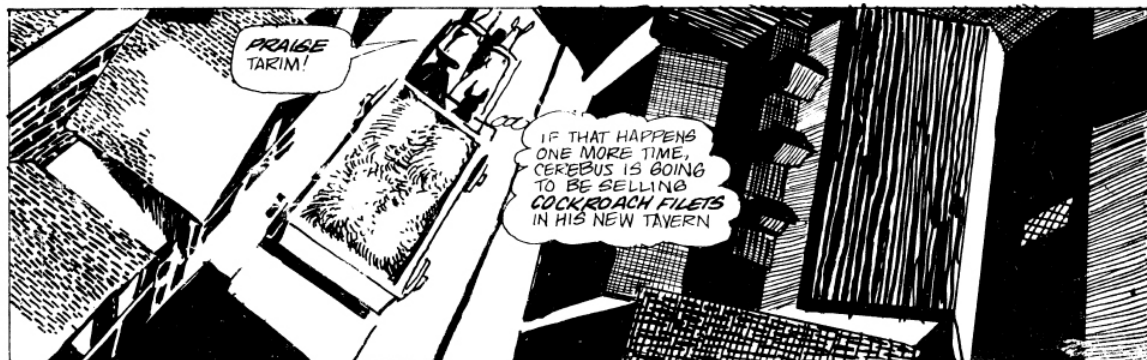
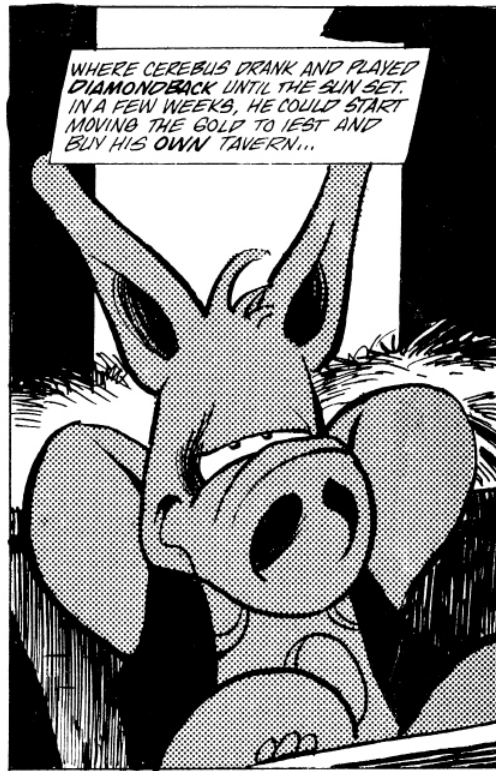


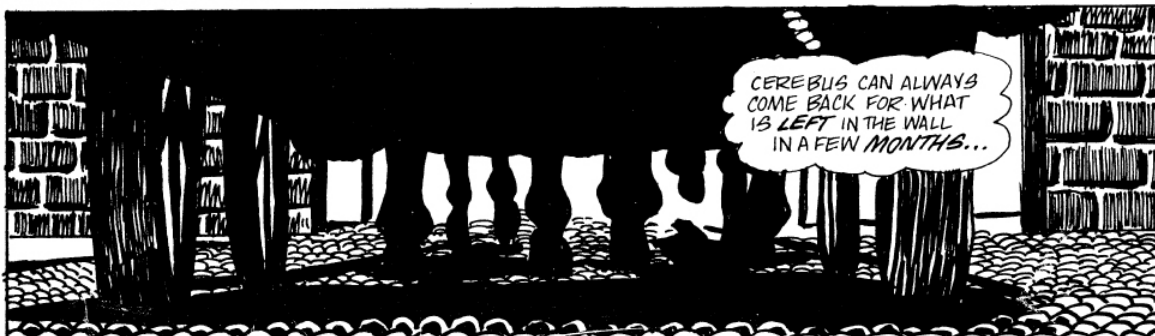




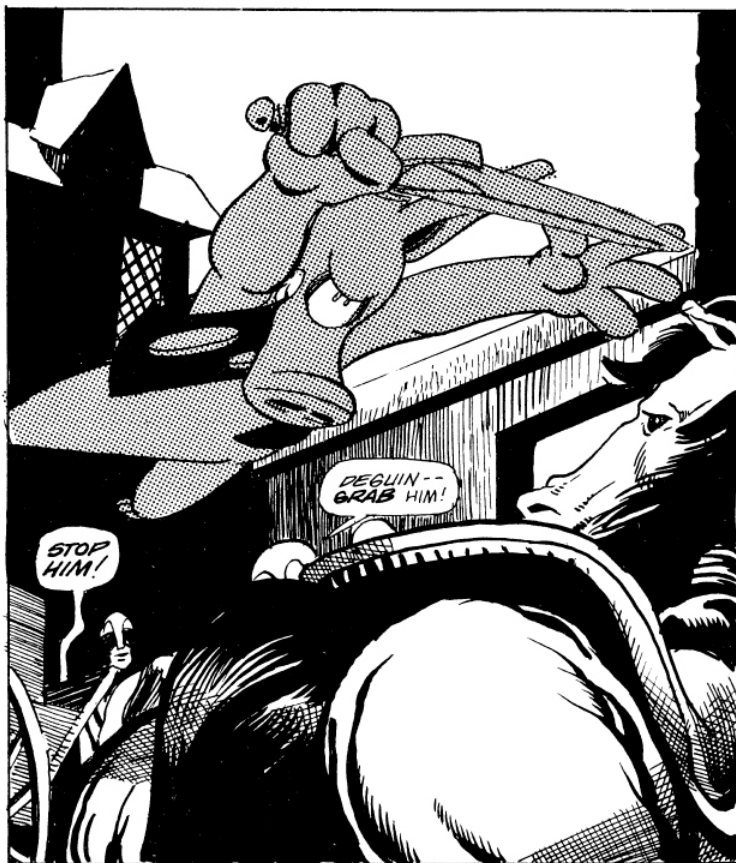


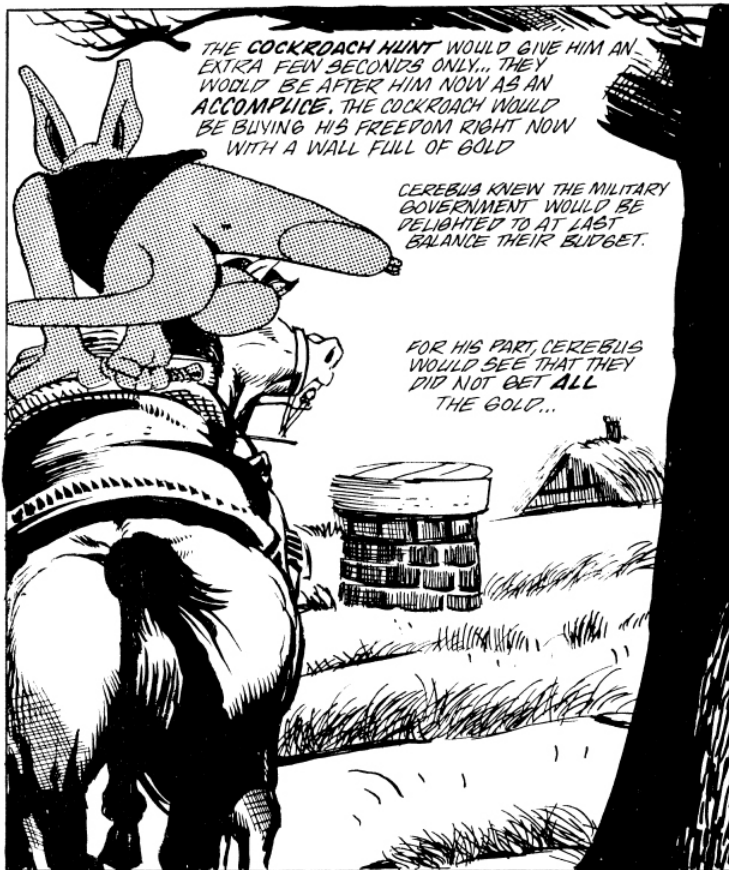












THE COCKROACH HUNT WOULD GIVE HIM AN EXTRA FEW SECONDS ONLY... THEY WOULD BE AFTER HIM NOW AS AN ACCOMPLICE. THE COCKROACH WOULD BE BUYING HIS FREEDOM RIGHT NOW WITH A WALL FULL OF GOLD

CEREBUS KNEW THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO AT LAST BALANCE THEIR BUDGET.

FOR HIS PART, CEREBUS WOULD SEE THAT THEY DID NOT GET ALL THE GOLD...



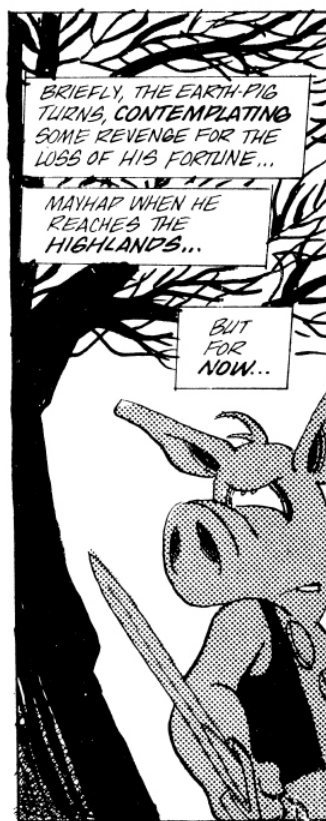
SEVEN SACKS! A SUBSTANTIAL DROP FROM EIGHT FEET OF LOOT, BUT ENOUGH TO GUARANTEE CEREBUS ALE MONEY FOR THE DURATION OF THE SPRING...

ONE MORE MINUTE AND THE SOLDIERS WOULDN'T HAVE A PRAYER OF CATCHING HIM...



BUT EVEN AS HE LASHES THE SACKS INTO PLACE ON THE SADDLE...

...SEVEN MOUNTED SOLDIERS THUNDER TOWARD HIM IN A SWIRL OF DUST...



BRIEFLY, THE EARTH-PIG TURNS, CONTEMPLATING SOME REVENGE FOR THE LOSS OF HIS FORTUNE...

MAYHAP WHEN HE REACHES THE HIGHLANDS...

BUT FOR NOW...





Cerebus the aardvark

BEDUIN NIGHT

CEREBUS COULD NOT HAVE SAID WHAT COMPELLED HIM TO REMAIN IN LOWER FELDA, BARELY AN HOUR'S RIDE FROM BEDUIN! GRANTED THE COCKROACH WAS BEHIND BARS AND HIS FORTUNE NOW RESIDED IN BEDUIN'S TREASURY-- BUT, SOMEHOW CEREBUS REFUSED TO BELIEVE THE GOLD WAS GONE...



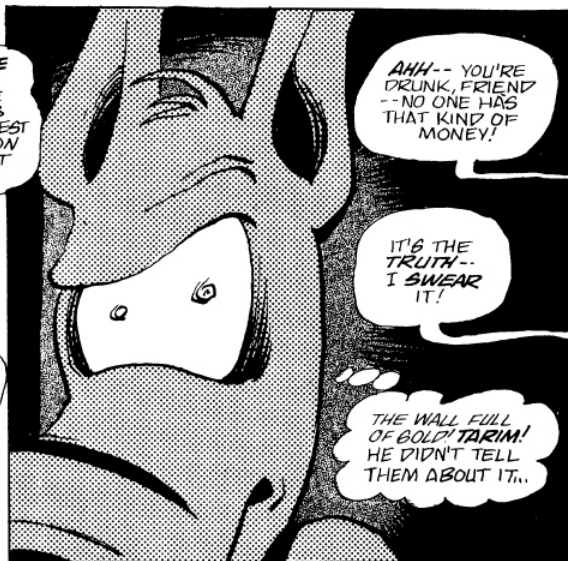
WHEN HE GOT DRUNK IN THOSE TWO WEEKS AFTER HIS ESCAPE HE COULD OFTEN FEEL GOLD COINS CRUNCHING BETWEEN HIS TOES...



AT LEAST, MY FRIEND--THE
COCKROACH WAS FINALLY
STOPPED AFTER ALL THESE
YEARS! LOCKED AWAY AS
HE DESERVES IN THE LOWEST
LEVEL OF *PRINIER PRISON*--
AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT
THEY FOUND?

A WALL
FULL OF
GOLD.

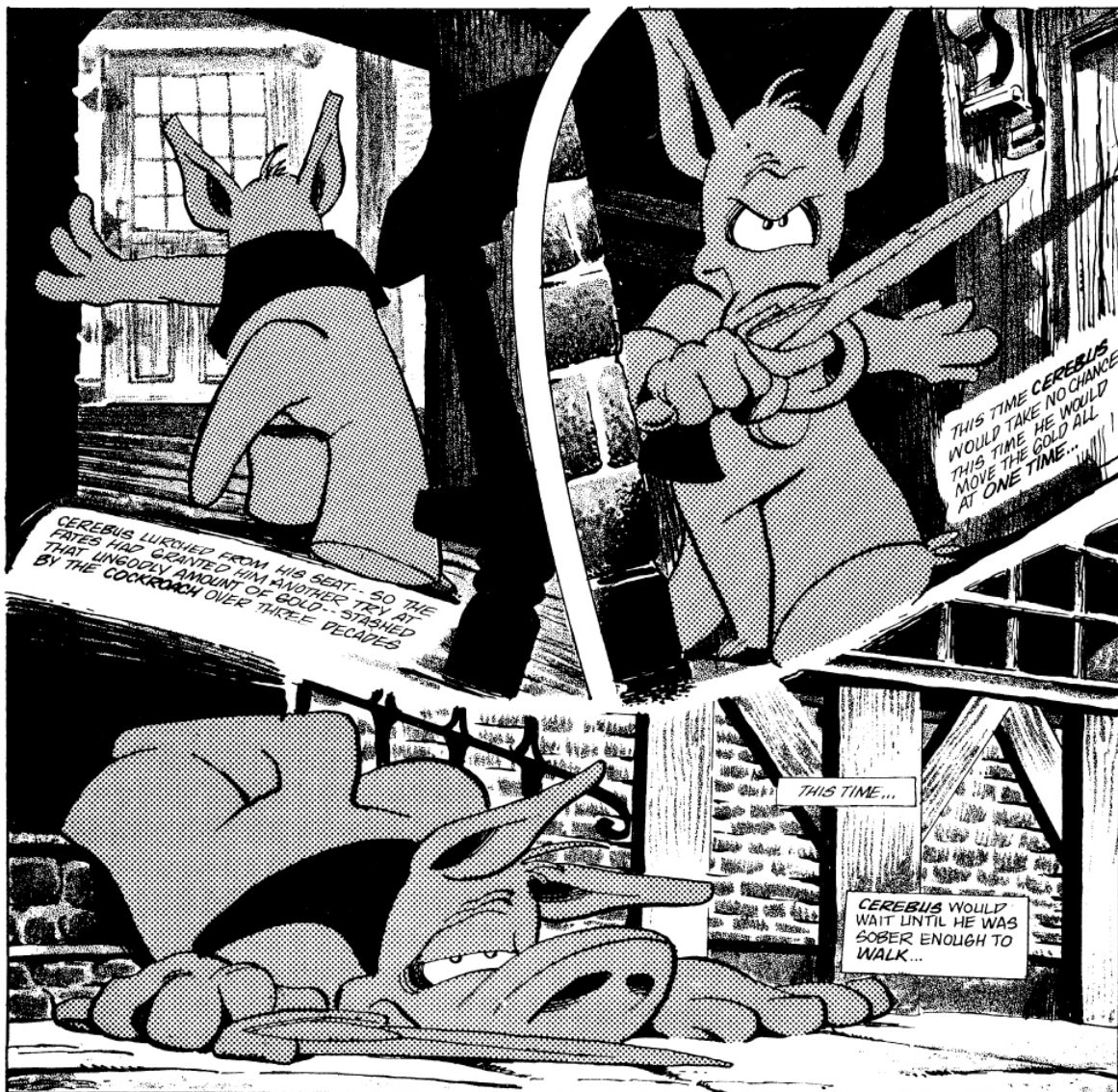
ALMOST A HUNDRED
SACKS OF GOLD IN
A DIRTY WELL!



AHH-- YOU'RE
DRUNK, FRIEND
--NO ONE HAS
THAT KIND OF
MONEY!

IT'S THE
TRUTH--
I SWEAR
IT!

THE WALL FULL
OF GOLD! *TARIM!*
HE DIDN'T TELL
THEM ABOUT IT...



CEREBUS LURCHED FROM HIS SEAT-- SO THE
FATES HAD GRANTED HIM ANOTHER TRY AT
THAT UNGODLY AMOUNT OF GOLD-- STASHED
BY THE COCKROACH OVER THREE DECADES

THIS TIME CEREBUS
WOULD TAKE NO CHANCES
THIS TIME HE WOULD
MOVE THE GOLD ALL
AT ONE TIME...

THIS TIME...

CEREBUS WOULD
WAIT UNTIL HE WAS
SOBER ENOUGH TO
WALK...



IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN THE AVERAGE SAILOR FOUR HOURS TO PADDLE INTO BEDUIN. AN HOUR LATER, CEREBUS WAS WATCHING FOR THE LOOMING SHAPE OF THE COCKROACH'S FORMER RESIDENCE

BUT THEN THE AVERAGE SAILOR WOULD NOT HAVE HAD THE BENEFIT OF THE EARTH-PIG'S MOTIVATING FORCE....



FRUSTRATED GREED....



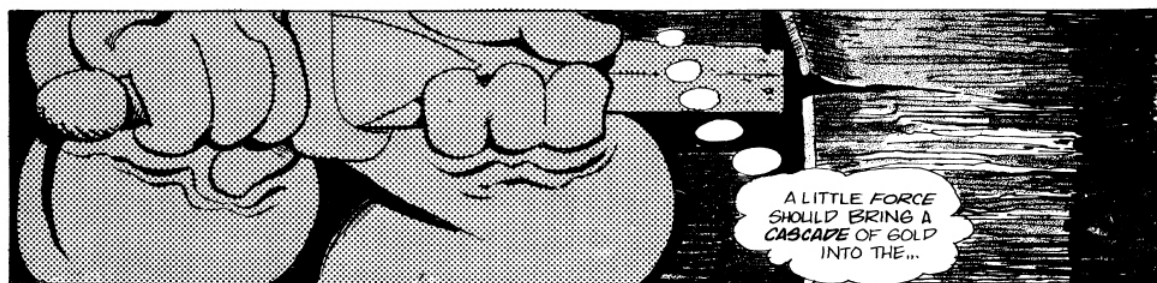
NO ONE IN SIGHT... CEREBUS PICKED A GOOD NIGHT

SCRAMBLING ONTO THE NARROW LEDGE, CEREBUS COULD ALMOST SMELL HIS FORTUNE

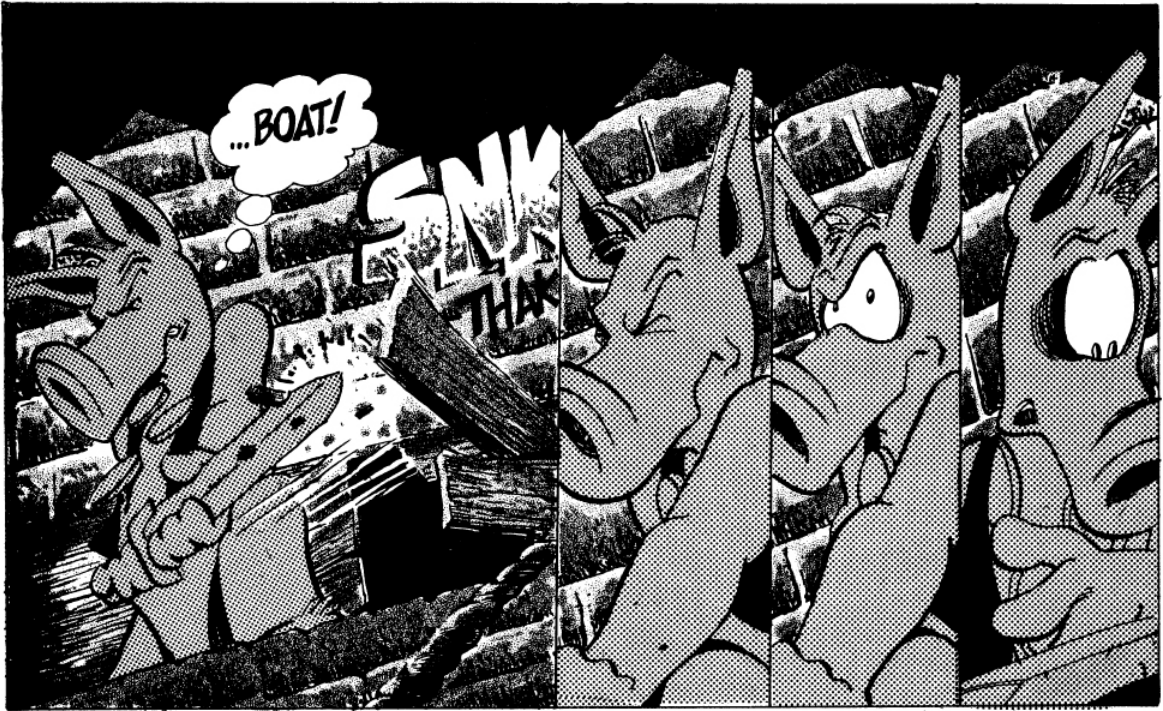


JUST AS CEREBUS REMEMBERED, THE STONE DOESN'T EXTEND ALL THE WAY TO THE BOTTOM...

AND THE WOOD LOOKS ROTTEN ENOUGH THAT...



A LITTLE FORCE SHOULD BRING A CASCADE OF GOLD INTO THE...



CEREBUS ENTERED THE WALL-SPACE READY TO REND, SLASH AND/OR MUTILATE ANYTHING THAT MOVED...

WHOEVER HAD ASSUMED THAT THE GOLD WAS THERE FOR THE TAKING WOULD PAY FOR THAT ASSUMPTION WITH HIS BLOOD...

THERE WAS JUST NO HONESTY ANYMORE TIME WAS AN AARDVARK COULD FEEL SAFE WITH HIS GOLD STASHED IN A...



BUT THEN CAME A BRIEF MOMENT OF CLARITY-- WHOEVER HAD STOLEN THE GOLD WAS LONG GONE...



CEREBUS STOOD VERY STILL, THE IDEA TURNING OVER IN HIS MIND...

THE GOLD WAS GONE...

IF IT WAS TRUE HE WOULD TAKE BEDUIN APART BRICK BY ROTTEN BRICK UNTIL HE FOUND THE GOLD --HIS GOLD. NO HALF-WITTED, WINE-SOAKED...

EH?



WHOEVER DID THIS WILL LIVE TO REGRET NOT COVERING HIS TRACKS...

...BY CLOVIS' RACK AND IRONS...

OF COURSE!

A TUNNEL!



CEREBUS WILL HANG HIM BY HIS THUMBES OVER A SLOW FLAME ...DROPPING HIM SLOWLY...

THEN DISMEMBER HIM-- STARTING WITH THE TOES AND WORKING UP...

THEN A FEW RED HOT NAILS DRIVEN INTO...

ON THE OTHER HAND THIS IS NO TIME FOR SUBTLETY...



BETTER THAT CEREBUS JUST RUN HIM THROUGH WITH...

OH, NO...





50!...
YOU'VE FOUND
MY COCKROACH
CAVE... MY
SECRET SANCTUM
...

THE
MOMENT I'VE
DREADED FOR
SO LONG...

WHICH ONE
OF MY ENEMIES
SENT YOU HERE
HUH? HUH?
WHICH ONE...



WAIT! I
RECOGNIZE
YOU-- YOU'RE
THE ONE WHO'S
BEEN WATCHING
ME-- WAITING
TO CATCH ME
UNAWARES

EXPLAIN
YOURSELF,
BOY OR GISS:
FACE THE
COCKROACH'S
WRATH!



CEREBUS COULDN'T AFFORD TO JUST
DISPOSE OF THE MORON UNTIL HE
COULD FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE
PRISON-- WHETHER THE COOTIE
WOULD BE MISSED...

MAYHAP HE WOULD SEE HOW
THE COCKROACH WOULD REACT
TO A MIRROR IMAGE OF
HIMSELF...

IT'S... IT'S
MY PARENTS
THEY WERE
MURDERED

I'M
AN
ORPHAN



BAAA-
AAAW

TARIM!!





YUP--THAT'S WHAT WE'LL DO--WE'LL MOVE THE GOLD

WE'LL SHOW THAT CRUMMY ELROD OF MELBARONE

TRY AND STEAL MY GOLD, WILL HE? WE'LL JUST SEE ABOUT...



uh-- HOW ARE WE GOING TO MOVE IT...

CEREBUS HAS A BOAT WAITING ON THE RIVER...



THANK YOU, OLD CHUM!

I'LL PAY YOU BACK--SOME DAY WE'LL HAVE A LOVELY BIG HOUSE--LUXURIOUS SURROUNDINGS

THE FINEST SILK ROBES--A BUTLER, AND FLOWERS--OH YES! LOTS AND LOTS OF FLOWERS...

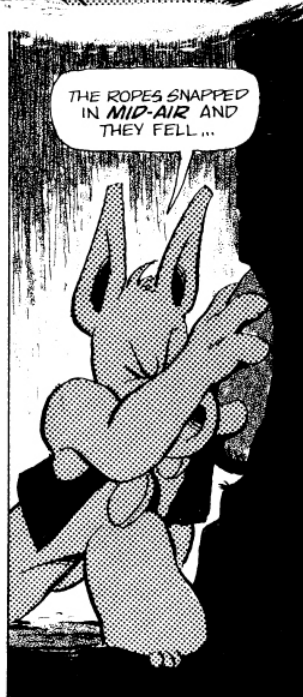
CEREBUS IS STARTING TO WONDER ABOUT THIS BUG...



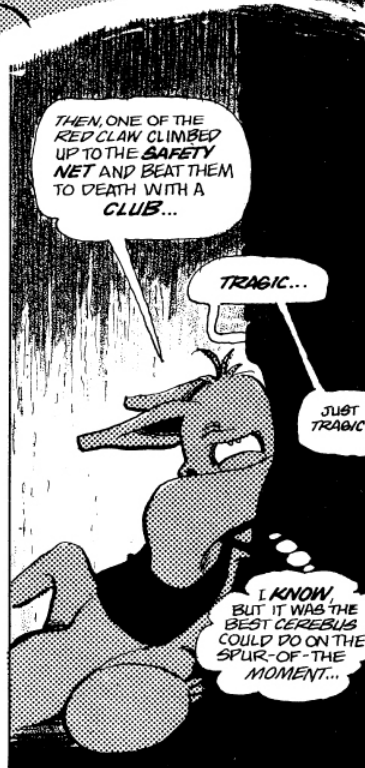
I KNOW IT'S A PAINFUL SUBJECT, BUT CAN YOU TELL ME HOW YOUR PARENTS DIED?

MOM AND DAD WERE CIRCUS PERFORMERS--ACROBATS

THE RED CLAW CULT CUT THROUGH THEIR TRAPEZE ROPES...



THE ROPES SNAPPED IN MID-AIR AND THEY FELL...



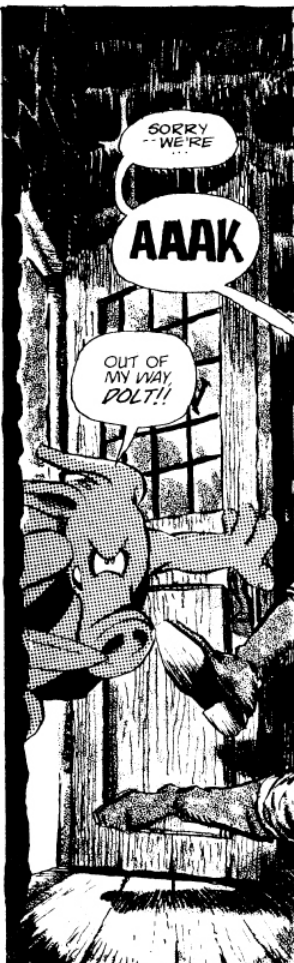
THEN, ONE OF THE RED CLAW CLIMBED UP TO THE SAFETY NET AND BEAT THEM TO DEATH WITH A CLUB...

TRAGIC...

JUST TRAGIC...

I KNOW BUT IT WAS THE BEST CEREBUS COULD DO ON THE SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT...







...WINDOW!

YOU

IDIOT!

EH?
MY-- MY
COCKROACH
SENSE IS
TINGLING!
HOW ODD...

ESPECIALLY
SINCE I DIDN'T
KNOW I HAD
A COCKROACH
SENSE!

THE PUFF
GUARDS WILL
PANTE CHECK
YOUR PUFF

CELL AND
PUFF FIND
PANTE YOU
GONE... AND...

PANTE NOTHING
BUT.... GOLD!



DO YOU HAVE ANY
IDEA HOW HARD IT'S
GOING TO BE TO
ROW THIS THING
UPSTREAM--FULL
OF GOLD!!?

**DO
YOU?!!**

**NOW-
GIVE-ME-
THAT-OAR!**



CEREBUS
FORGOT TO
MENTION...

IT LOOKS BAD
NOW, OLD CHUM
BUT, IF YOU LOOK
ON THE *BRIGHT*
SIDE...

IF YOU SAY ONE
WORD--HE'S GOING
TO USE YOU FOR
AN OAR...



THEIR PROGRESS IN THE FIRST TEN
MINUTES COULD BE MEASURED IN
INCHES! CEREBUS KNEW HE WOULD
HAVE TO ROW A GOOD QUARTER
MILE TO REACH QUIETER WATER



CEREBUS,
BOY!...

I'D--I SAY--
I'D KNOW THAT
BUNNY-SUIT
ANYWHERE!

OH,
TARIM,
NO!



WELL, I'LL BE
WRAPPED IN HAM-
FAT AND PICKLED
FOR THE HOLIDAYS
...

IT
IS
YOU!



SAY SOMETHING, BOY..
DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE
FORGOTTEN ELROD THE
ALBINO -- SAY -- WHO'S
YOUR FRIEND WITH THE
CURB-FEELERS IMBEDDED
IN HIS SKULL?



ELROD?

DID HE
SAY --
ELROD?!
...

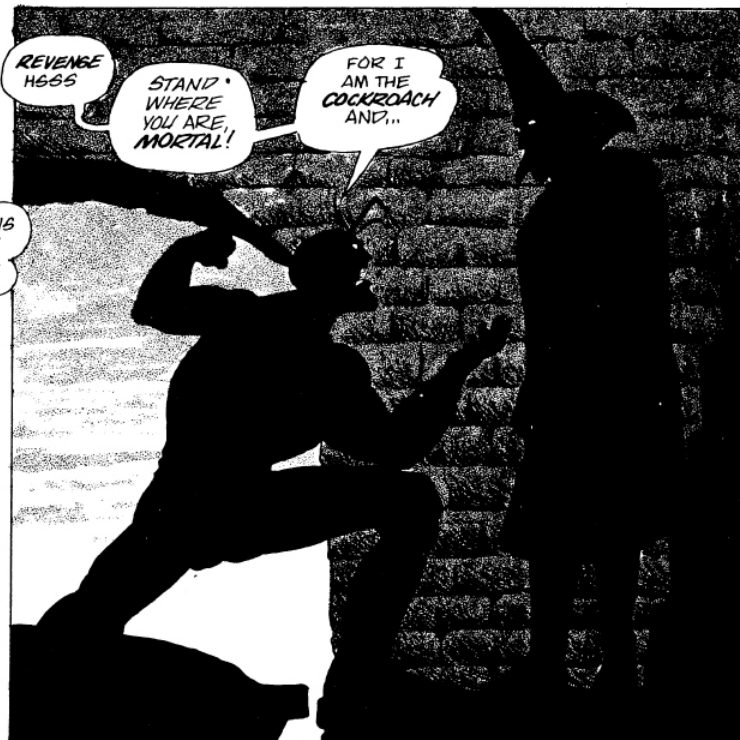


YES! YES!
THAT'S WHAT
HE SAID --
NO DOUBT AT
ALL -- IT'S
HIM!

HSSSS!

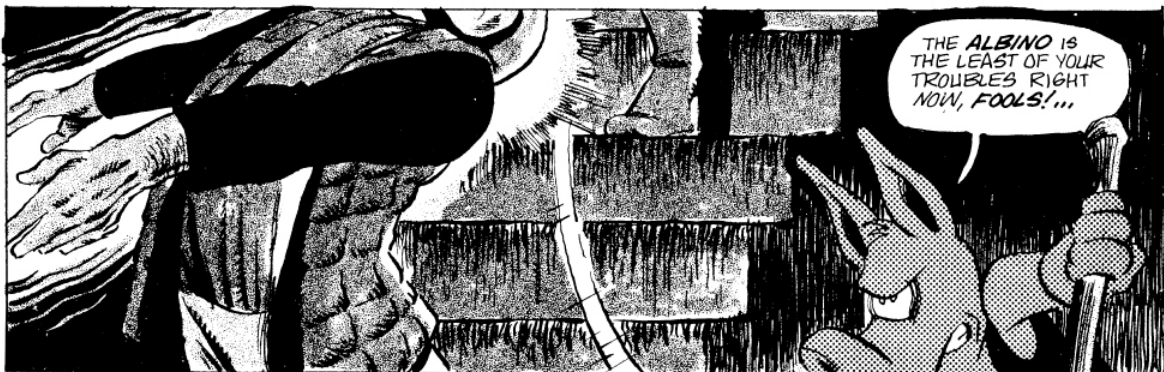
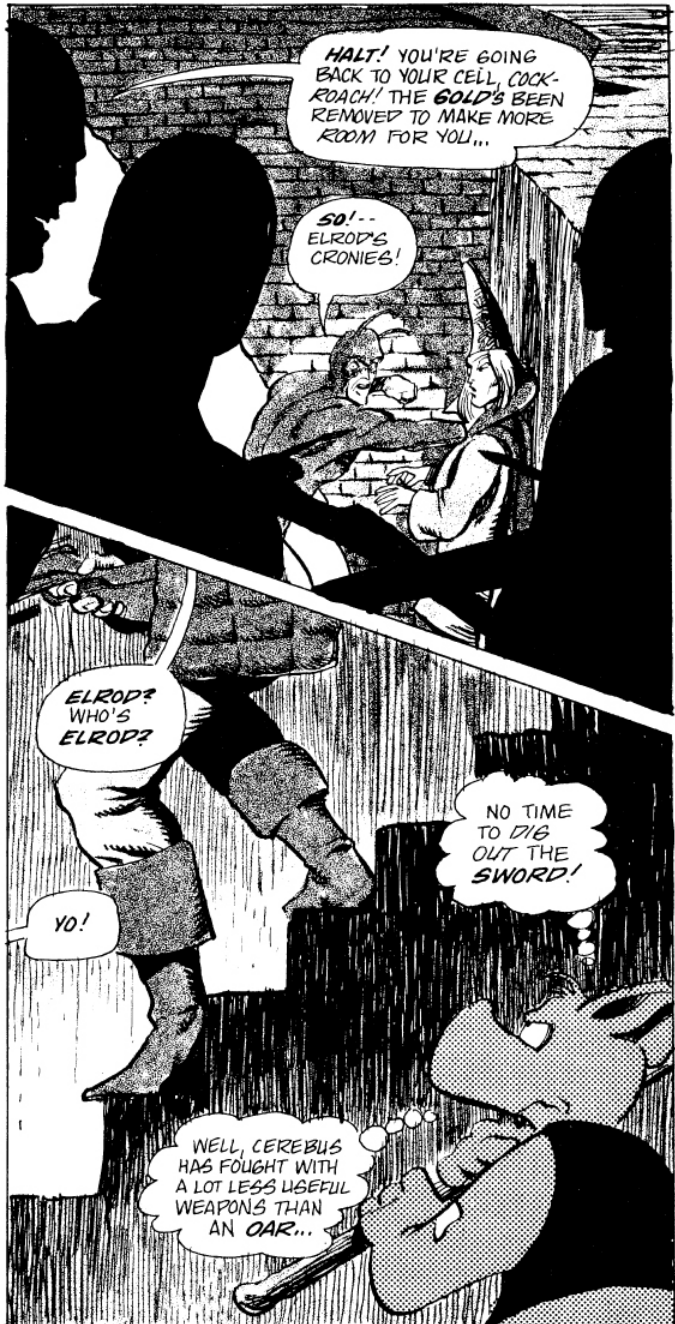
HEH-HEH! MY REPUTATION
-- I SAY -- MY REPUTATION
PRECEDES ME, EH? DON'T
FREEZE UP, SON...

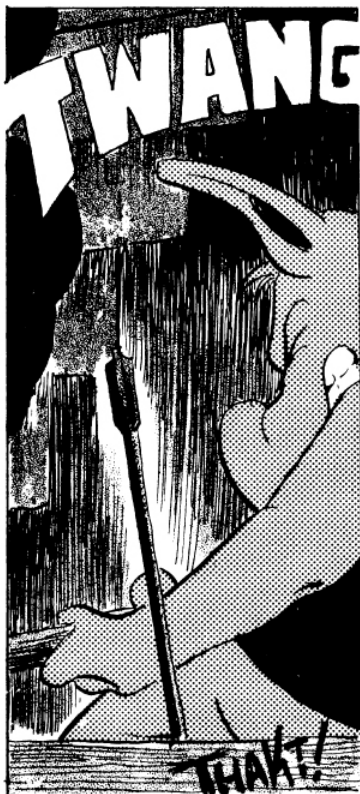
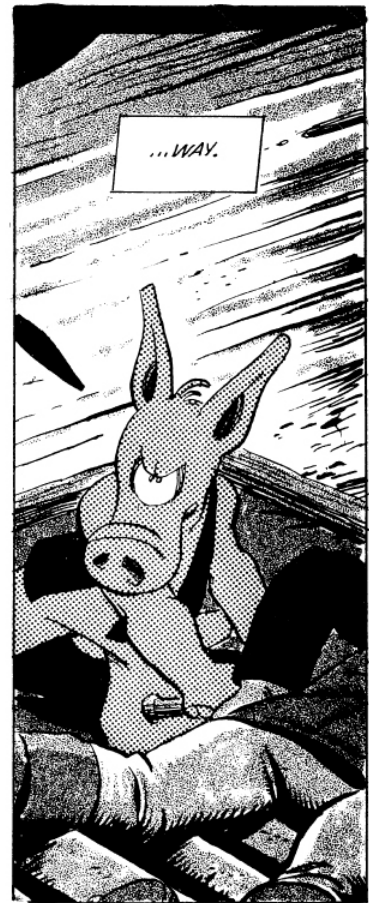
THIS MIGHT BE
YOUR ONLY CHANCE
TO MEET A GENUINE
LAST RULER OF
A DYING RACE



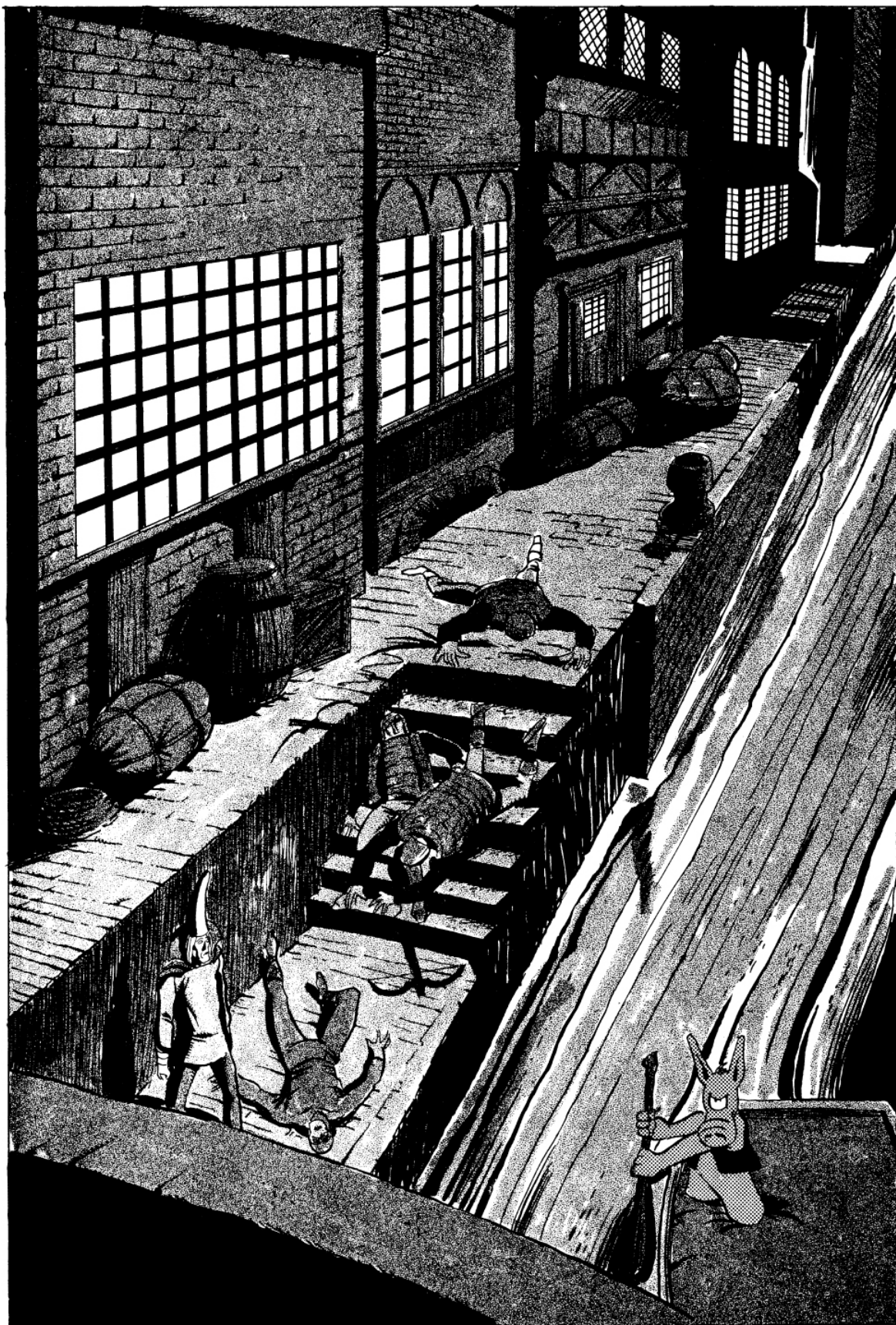












HE WOULD HEAD FOR ONE OF THE SMALLER TOWNS BORDERING BEDUIN AND BUY THE TAVERN HE HAD BEEN THINKING ABOUT...

SOME DAY--
I SAY, SOME DAY,
SON, WE'RE GOING
TO HAVE TO HAVE
A LONG TALK...

AND YOU
CAN EXPLAIN
WHAT IN THE
HECK JUST
HAPPENED
HERE...

AS HE DRIFTS OUT OF THE TUNNEL, CEREBUS LOOKS UP TO SEE THE SUN RISING...

THE LONG BEDUIN
NIGHT WAS OVER

...AND THE GOLD
WAS HIS...

WITH THE SUN COMES
A WAVE OF EXULTATION
AND A STRANGE NEW
SENSE OF OPTIMISM...

LET THEM SEND MORE SOLDIERS
--A WHOLE ARMY! HE WOULD FIGHT
THEM OFF, TOO-- THE GOLD-
WAS-HIS!!

A BOATFUL
OF IT!!

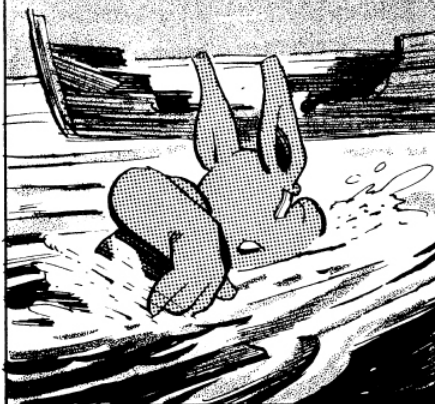
ABRUPTLY, CEREBUS' WORLD SHATTERS AND QUICKLY REFORMS AS A MONTAGE OF IMAGES-- MURKY WATER, SPLINTERED TIMBERS AND AN ELUSIVE TWINKLING VANISHING BELOW HIM...



CEREBUS' HEAD BREAKS THE SURFACE AND HE GULPS LUNGS-FUL OF AIR-- AIR THAT SOMEHOW NO LONGER SMELLED AS SWEET AS IT HAD BARE MOMENTS BEFORE...



HE SWIMS TO THE SHATTERED FRAME OF THE BOAT! HIS INTENTION WAS TO ESCAPE BEFORE THE SOLDIERS AWAKE



THERE WAS NO TIME FOR REGRET OR SELF-RECRIMINATION...

IF ANYTHING, HE IS GRATEFUL THAT THE WEATHER IS WARM AND THE CURRENT SWIFT...



WITH A MINIMUM OF EFFORT HE WOULD BE OUTSIDE OF BEDOUIN'S WALLS WITHIN THE HOUR IN SEARCH OF SHELTER FOOD AND ALE



"ALL THINGS CONSIDERED," MUSES THE EARTH-PIG...

"IT'S BEEN ONE HELL OF A LOUSY TWENTY-SEVENTH BIRTHDAY..."



cerebus the aardvark

THE FIRST
BREATH OF
SUMMER
IN LOWER
FELDA...



A SOLITARY BIRD
WINGS OVER THE
LUSH FARMING
LAND FOLLOWING
THE COURSE OF
THE CLEAR BLUE
FELD RIVER...

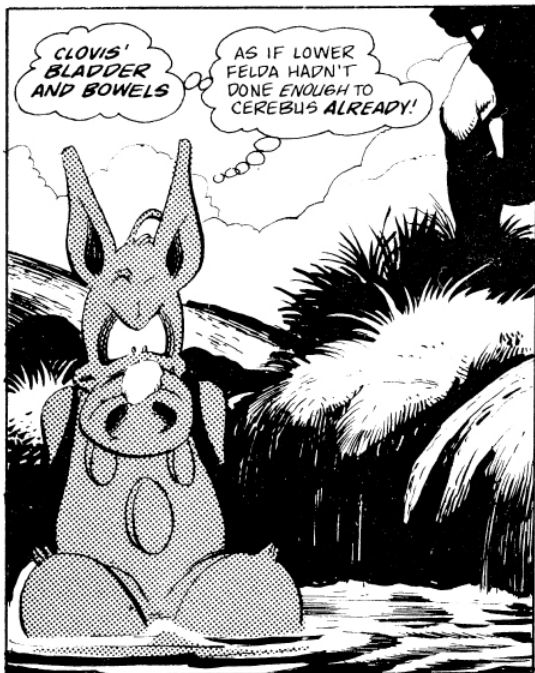


AND WHETHER IT
IS COGNIZANT OF
THE FACT OR NOT...



IT BECOMES YET ANOTHER
LINK IN THE CHAIN OF
MISFORTUNE WHICH HAS
RECENTLY HOUNDED A
CERTAIN EARTH-PIG BORN!





BLACK MAGICKING





CEREBUS IS NO CREATURE OF SORCERY!

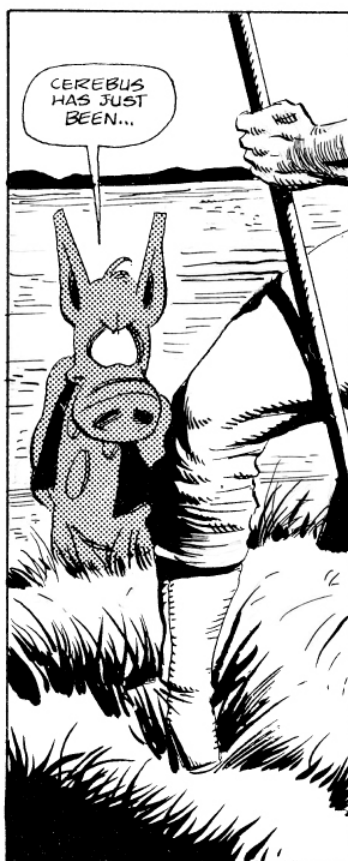
CEREBUS CONTEMPLATES RUSHING THE LEADER RESTRAINED ONLY BY HIS KNOWLEDGE OF FELD FARMERS...

...AS THE RAW MATERIAL FOR FELDWAR ARMIES THEY ARE RUGGED AND VICIOUS COMBATANTS!



THEN EXPLAIN YOUR PRESENCE HERE...

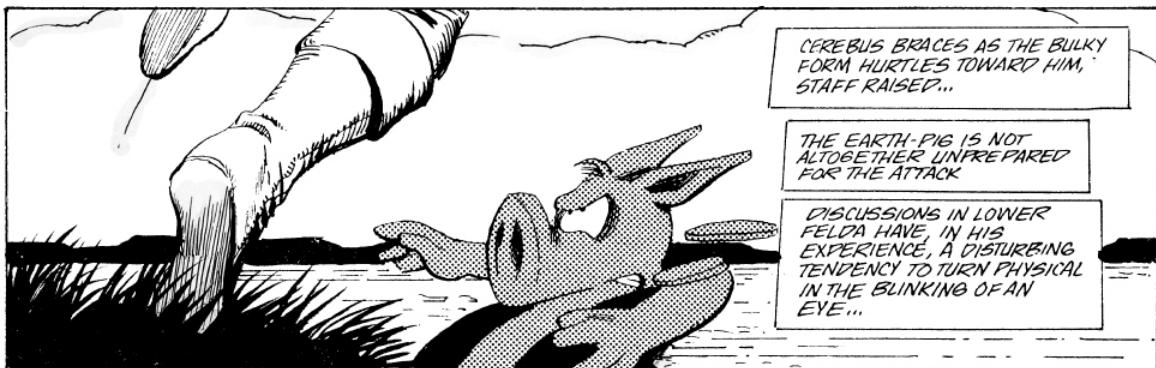
...NOW!



CEREBUS HAS JUST BEEN...



LYING DEVIL SPAWN!



CEREBUS BRACES AS THE BULKY FORM HURTLIES TOWARD HIM, STAFF RAISED...

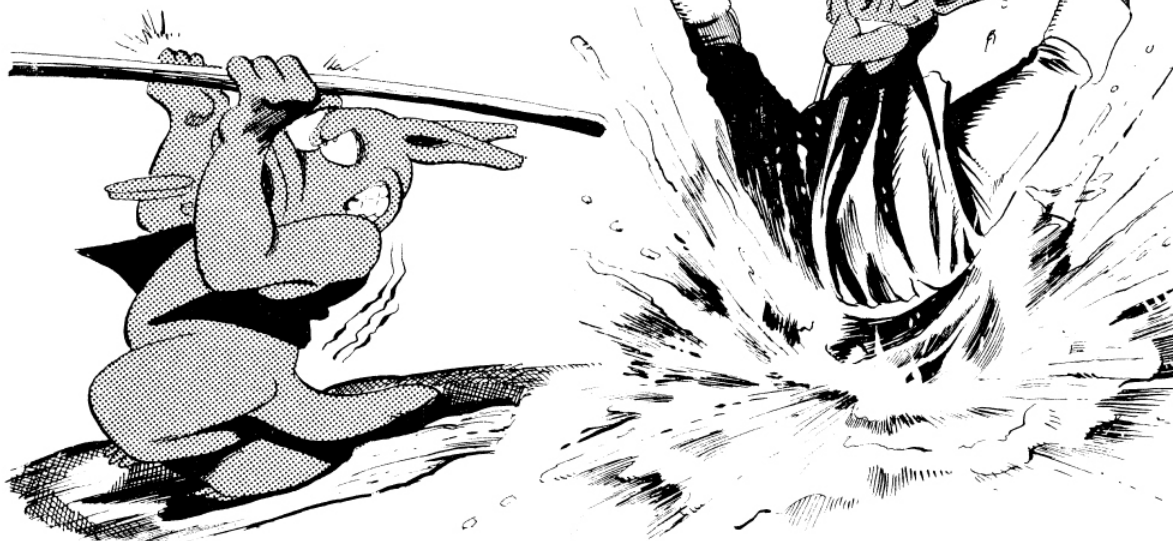
THE EARTH-PIG IS NOT ALTOGETHER UNPREPARED FOR THE ATTACK

DISCUSSIONS IN LOWER FELDA HAVE, IN HIS EXPERIENCE, A DISTURBING TENDENCY TO TURN PHYSICAL IN THE BLINKING OF AN EYE...

THE ATTACKING FARMER, OVERCONFIDENT WITH HIS SIZE ADVANTAGE, WIELDS HIS HEAVY, WOODEN STAFF LIKE A FLYSWATTER...

THE RESULTS OF THIS ERROR IN JUDGEMENT, AS WOOD IMPACTS WITH EARTH-PIG PALMS, IS...

...PREDICTABLE.



AS HIS FOE STRUGGLES TO HIS FEET, THE EARTH-PIG TOSSES THE STAFF TO ONE SIDE...

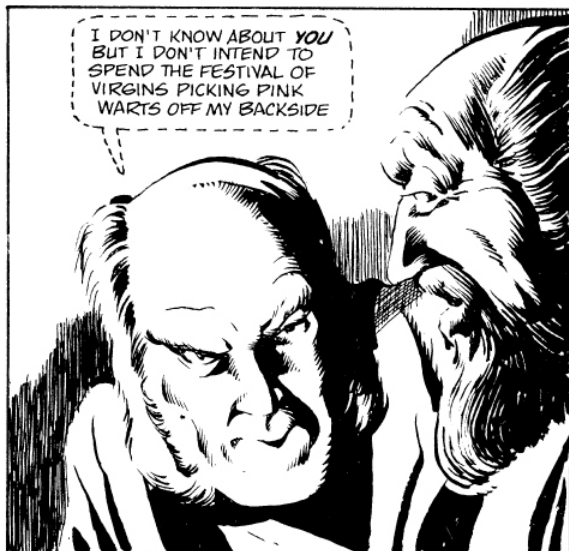
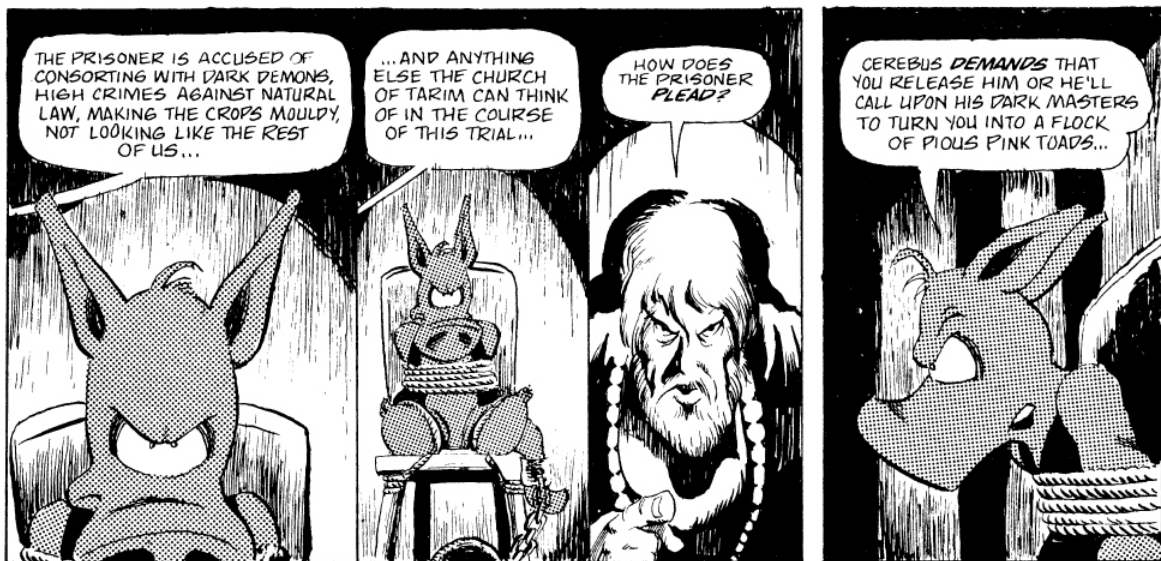
...CEREBUS INTENDS TO BEAT THE FARMER TO A PULP-- NOT POLE-VAULT OVER HIM!

ENOUGH!

THIS IS A MATTER FOR THE CHURCH OF TARIM TO DECIDE...

SEIZE HIM AND WE'LL TAKE HIM TO THE PRIEST!







TARIM HAS LISTENED TO THE CHARGES AND DECLARES NOW THAT JUSTICE MUST BE SERVED...



AS PRIEST OF THEIR I SHALL SEE TARIM'S WILL IS DONE



EH?



SOME SORT OF...

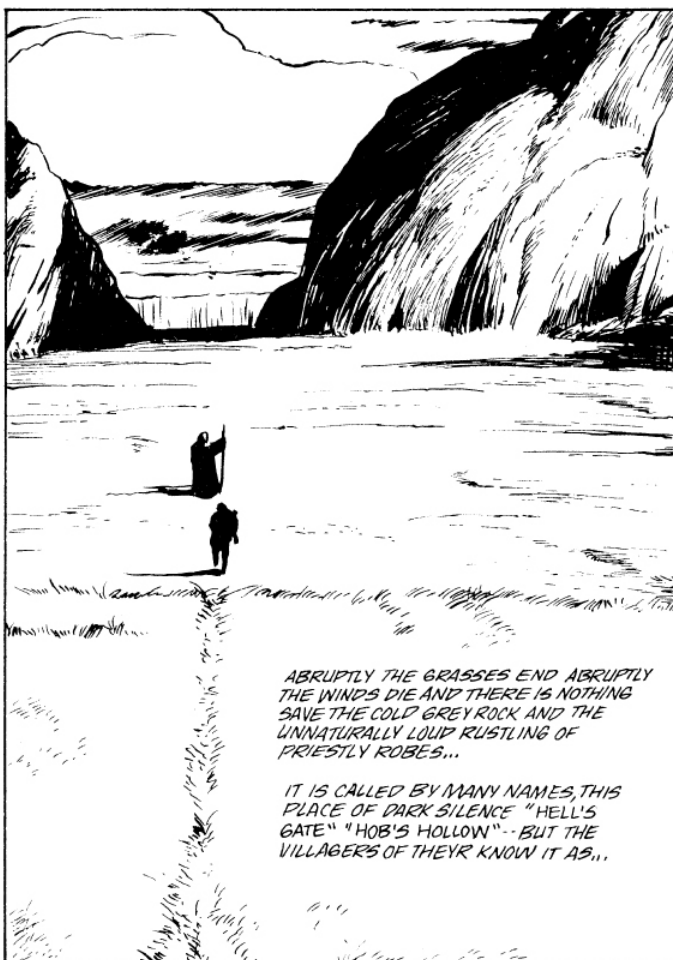


PRaise TARIM AND HIS INFINITE MERCY!

...SIGNAL...

SOME TIME LATER, THE PRIEST APPEARS MOVING AWAY FROM THE VILLAGE AND ITS FIELDS -- HIS EXPRESSION GRIM AND DETERMINED...

... HE IS FOLLOWED BY ONE OF THE FARMERS WHO CARRIES AN INERT GREY BUNDLE ON ONE SHOULDER...



ABRUPTLY THE GRASSES END ABRUPTLY THE WINDS DIE AND THERE IS NOTHING SAVE THE COLD GREY ROCK AND THE UNNATURALLY LOUD RUSTLING OF PRIESTLY ROBES...

IT IS CALLED BY MANY NAMES, THIS PLACE OF DARK SILENCE "HELL'S GATE" "HOB'S HOLLOW" -- BUT THE VILLAGERS OF THEIR KNOW IT AS...

...THE CASTLE.

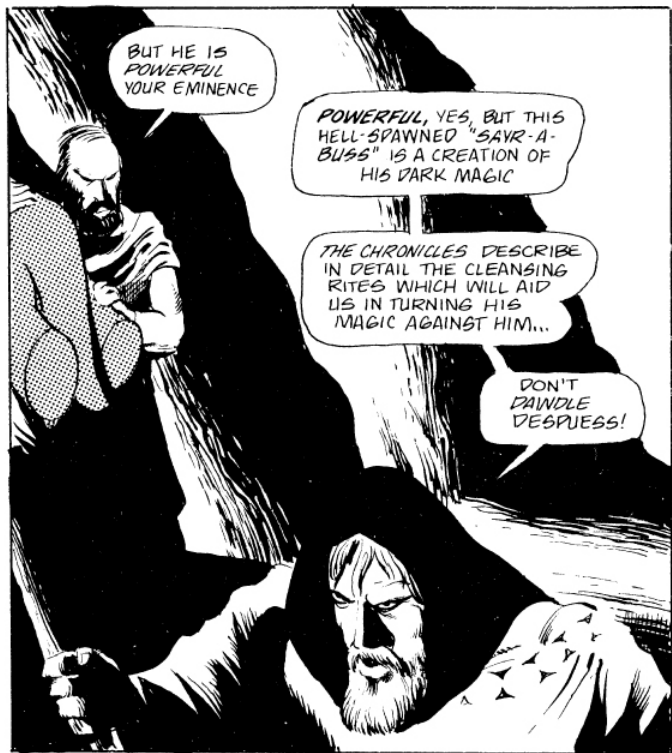
LODGED IN THE VALLEY OF MISTS
IT IS DARK AND UNHOLY HOME TO
NECROSS THE MAD REPUTED TO
BE THE MOST EVIL AND CUNNING
OF THE BLACK SORCERERS...

HIS EVIL IS LEGENDARY IN
LOWER FELDA, CAUSING
CATASTROPHE AFTER CATASTROPHE
--THE BLACK DEATH, THE
AVALANCHE AT SAN TRE MAIN,
THE GREAT FIRE OF BEDUIN

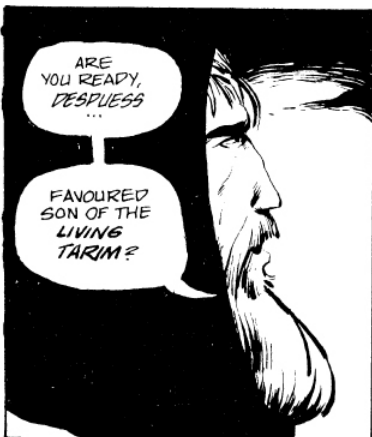
NOT TO MENTION THE
PREGNANCY OF ALANNE
THE MILK-MAID...

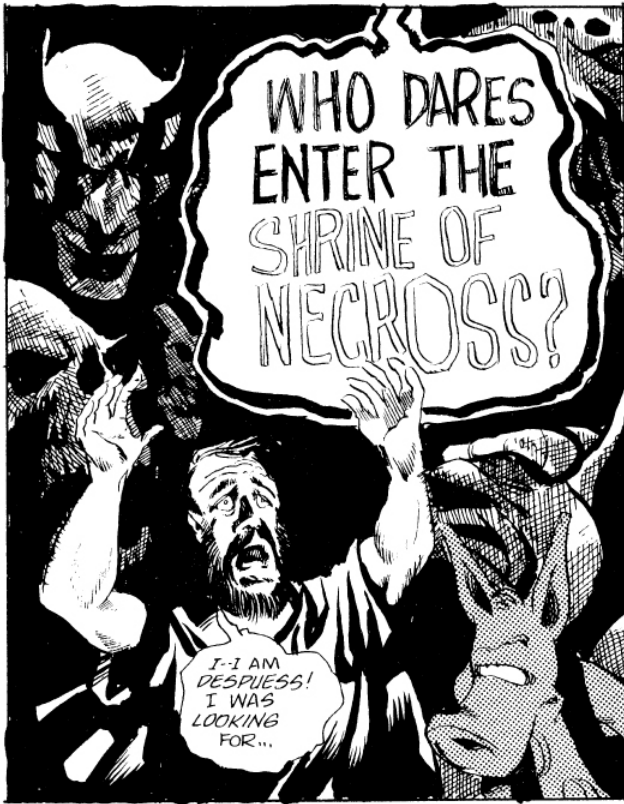
WHO DIDN'T RELISH THE
IDEA OF BEING FORCED
TO MARRY GUMS, THE
VILLAGE IDIOT...

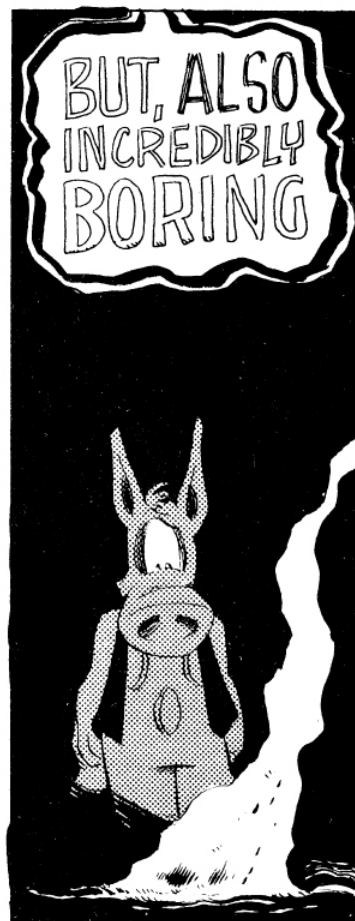






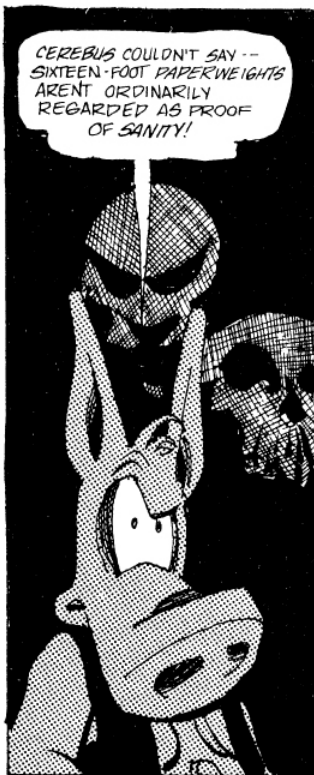






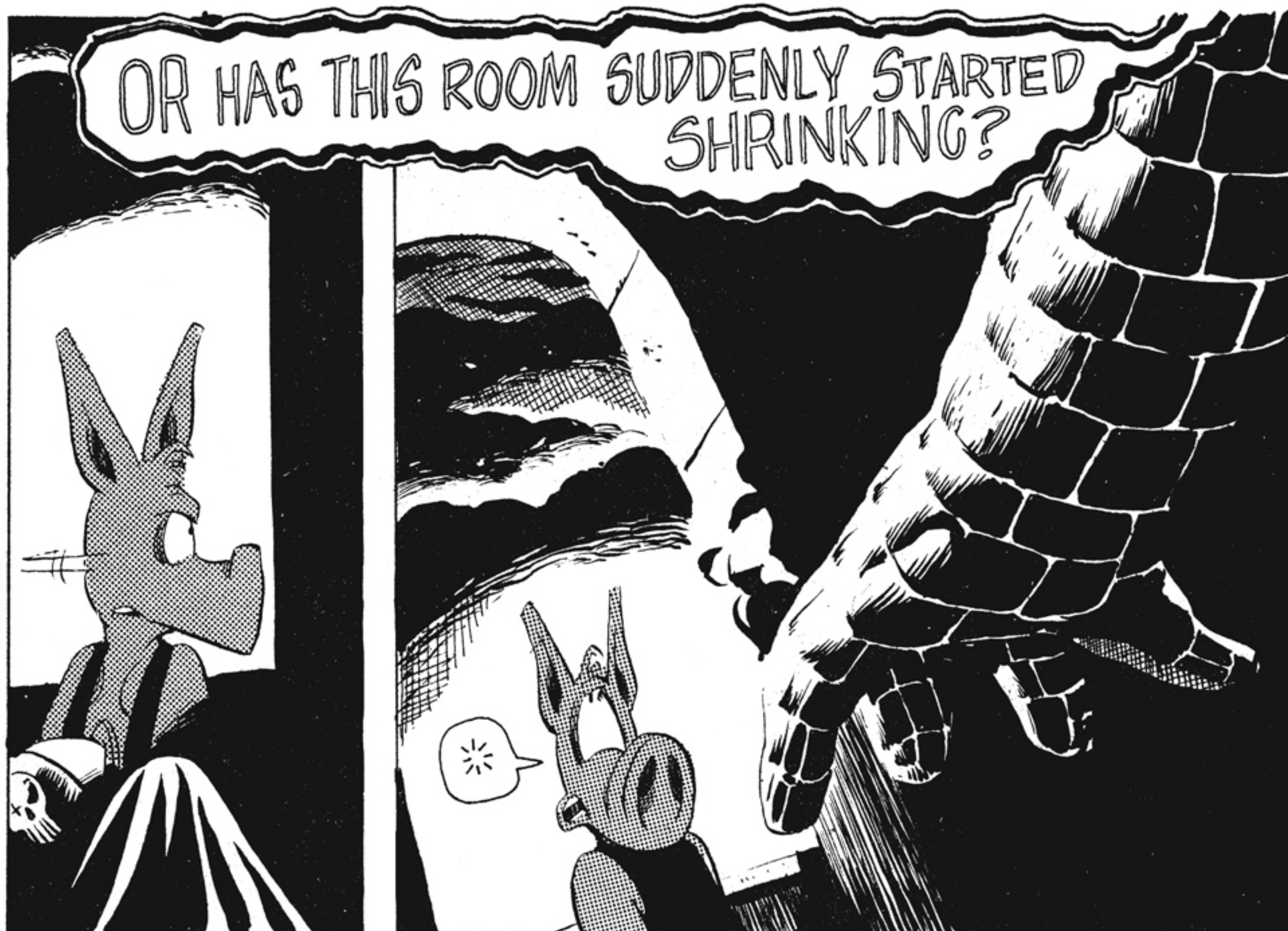


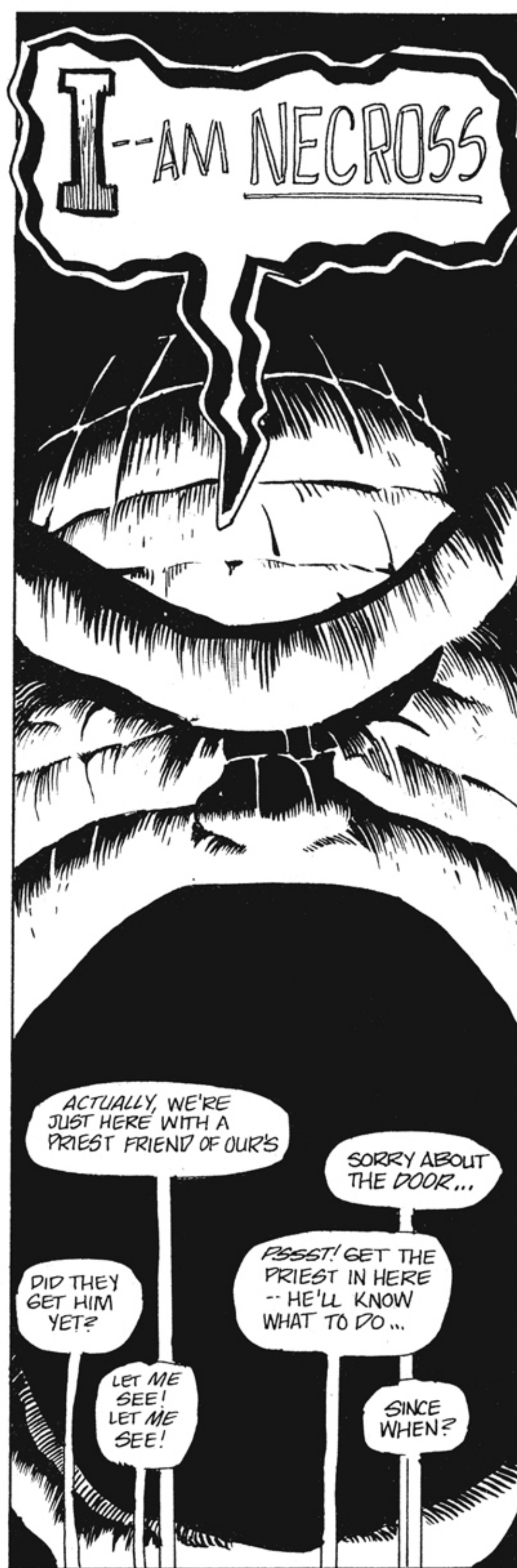












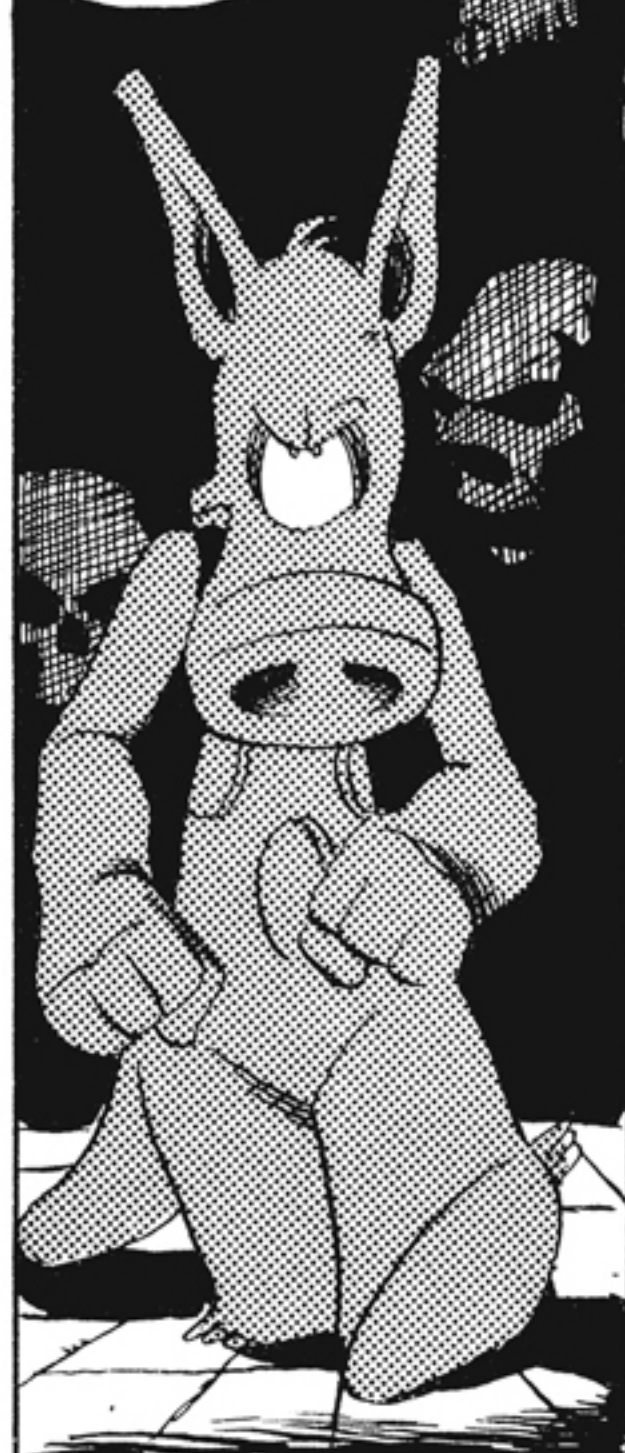
FOOLS! I'LL CRUSH YOU ALL!!

STOMP STOMP

WELL? DID YOU GUYS GET HIM OR...AAAK!

SAY-- IT'S AWFULLY GORY IN HERE!

LET ME SEE! LET ME SEE!



THIS TIME, CEREBUS HAD DEFINITELY HAD ENOUGH! EVERYONE-- EVERYONE IN LOWER FELDA WAS IN-BLOODY-SANE...


HE HAD WASTED THE BETTER PART OF FOUR WRETCHED MONTHS IN THIS OPEN-AIR SANITARIUM...

THE PRIEST! BRING ME THE PRIEST!

THE PRIEST? ISN'T HE THAT RED BLOT ON THE FLOOR OVER THERE?

NAW-- THAT'S D'MITRI

I GET HIS SHARE OF THE CROPS WHEN WE GET BACK TO THE VILLAGE...



WELL NO MORE! BROKE OR NOT, HE WOULD BE OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES OF THE FELDWAR STATES INSIDE OF A WEEK OR DIE IN THE ATTEMPT...

HE HAD CHASED A SIX-FOOT COOTIE ACROSS BEDUIN... GRAPPLING WITH SOLDIERS ON TWO OCCASIONS, BOTH TIMES LOSING A FORTUNE IN GOLD...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU GET HIS SHARES OF THE CROPS, PORK BREATH

HE WAS MY BROTHER!

BRING ME THE PRIEST OR YOU'RE ALL DEAD!

YOU KEEP OUT OF THIS, GRANITE FACE...



HE HAD SPENT FOUR DAYS ADRIPT ON THE FELD RIVER ONLY TO BE WAYLAIED BY A BUNCH OF FARMERS WHO LIVED IN MORTAL FEAR OF A HERMIT MAGICIAN WHO SCULPTED SIXTEEN FOOT PAPERWEIGHTS IN HIS SPARE TIME...

GRANITE FACE?! WHO ARE YOU CALLING GRANITE FACE?

YOU, YA BIG STIFF!

YEAH-- WHO DO YOU THINK YOU...

STOMP STOMP



TARIM! CEREBUS WAS THE ONLY NORMAL CREATURE IN THE WHOLE DAMNED COUNTRY



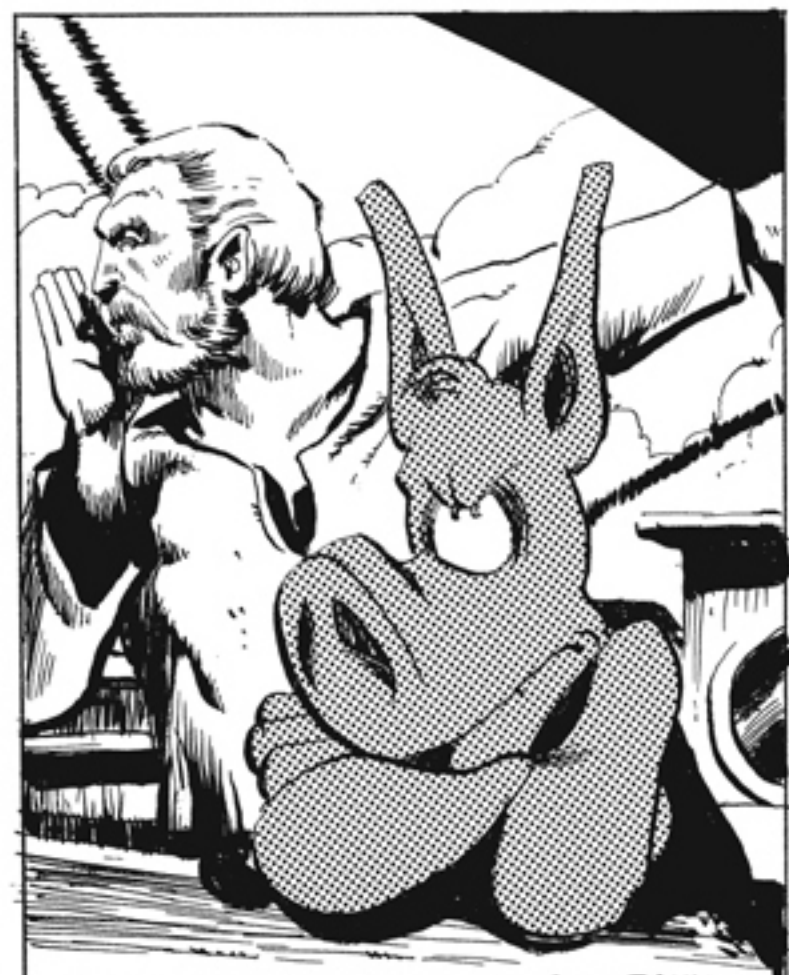




Cerebus THE AARDVARK



SYNOPSIS: HAVING DECIDED TO LEAVE LOWER FELDA BEHIND, CEREBUS MAKES HIS WAY TO THE PORT CITY OF VENIEAU, WHERE HE BOOKS PASSAGE...



ON THE TRADING VESSEL CUTTER BOUND FOR HOME -- THE CITY-STATE OF PALNU



"IT IS A RARE SUMMER'S DAY" CRIED THE SICKENINGLY CHEERFUL SON OF THE DIRECTOR OF TRADE AT PALNU.



"IT HAS THE SMELL OF NEW ADVENTURE TO IT" SMILES YOUNG LORD SILVERSPoon TURNING HIS FACE TO THE SUN



"AND A HOLD FILLED WITH WINE AND SPICES" HE CHUCKLES. "FATHER WILL BE SO PROUD!"



"BUT NOW, WE SET SAIL FOR THE BAY OF SUNSHEE -- AND WHO KNOWS WHAT PIRATES AND BRIGANDS WE SHALL ENCOUNTER IN OUR TRAVELS?" HE BUBBLES FLINGING OUT HIS ARM, CARELESSLY.



"SURE THING" MUTTERS THE EARTH-PIG "HOW ABOUT A SEA SERPENT WHILE WE'RE THERE, YOU SNOTTY ARISTOCRATIC BRAT"

DAVE GIM

NEXT WEEK: SEA SERPENT

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



"GREAT TARIM" CRIES THE CREW IN UNISON, "IT IS A SEA SERPENT!"



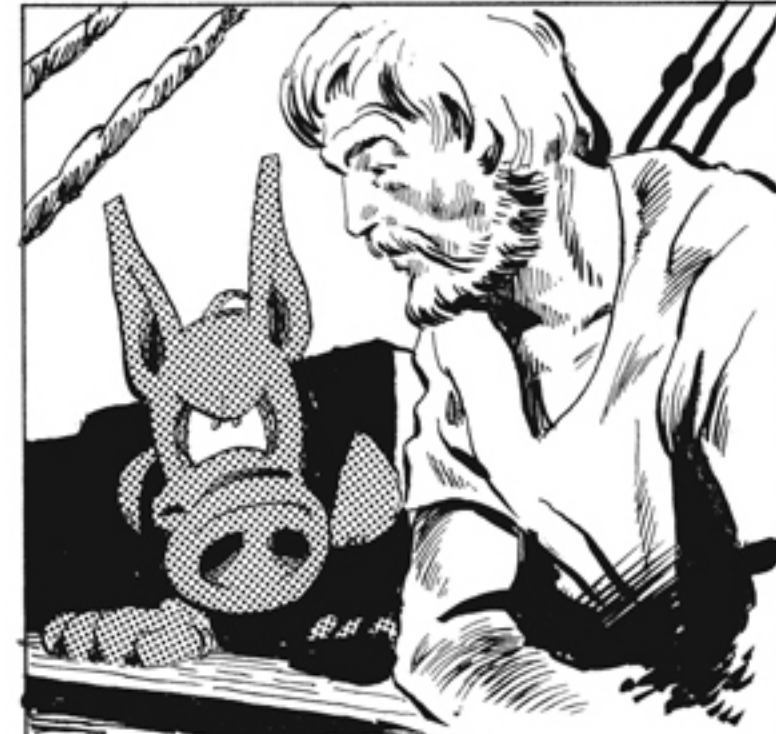
"ONE SIDE, EARTH-PIG" CRIES SILVER-
SPOON, "THIS IS MY SPECIALTY"



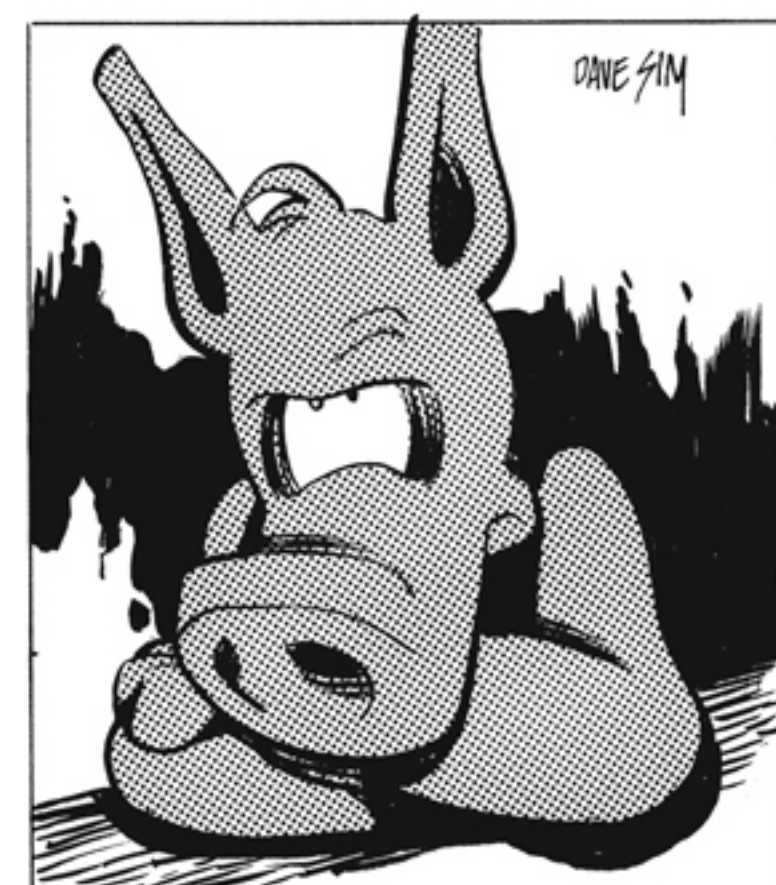
"SOMEONE HELP ME GET THE
ROWBOAT INTO THE WATER,"
HE ADDS, "AND BRING ME A SWORD"



"WHAT ON EARTH IS THAT THING" QUERIES CEREBUS. "IT'S MOSTLY
MADE OF ANIMAL FAT AND PLASTER AND SNAKE SKIN," ANSWERS
DHUFU, ONE OF THE MERCHANTS "WE MAKE A HABIT OF DROPPING
IT INTO THE WATER AT LEAST ONCE PER VOYAGE, SO THAT HIS
LORDSHIP HAS THE ADVENTURE HE SEEKS"
"BUT ISN'T THIS A RATHER TIME-CONSUMING WAY TO HUMOUR
HIM?" ASKS THE EARTH-PIG, AS SILVER-
SPOON HACKS A LARGE
PIECE OUT OF THE 'SERPENT.'
"POSSIBLY, BUT IT'S EASIER TO LIVE WITH THAN HIS LORDSHIP'S OTHER
INTEREST"
"WHICH IS WHAT?"



"ENGAGING ONLILU PIRATE VESSELS
IN EXTENDED NAVAL BATTLES AND
FIGHTING TO THE LAST MAN"
COMES THE REPLY.



"YES," AGREED CEREBUS "I
CAN SEE HOW THIS IS A
LESS DANGEROUS HOBBY
FOR A YOUNG NOBLE"

NEXT WEEK: ONLILU PIRATE VESSEL

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



SYNOPSIS: WITH BARELY A HALF DOZEN ARMED SOLDIERS, CEREBUS DIRECTS THE DEFENCE OF THE TRADING VESSEL CUTTER, UNDER ATTACK FROM ONLIIU PIRATES.



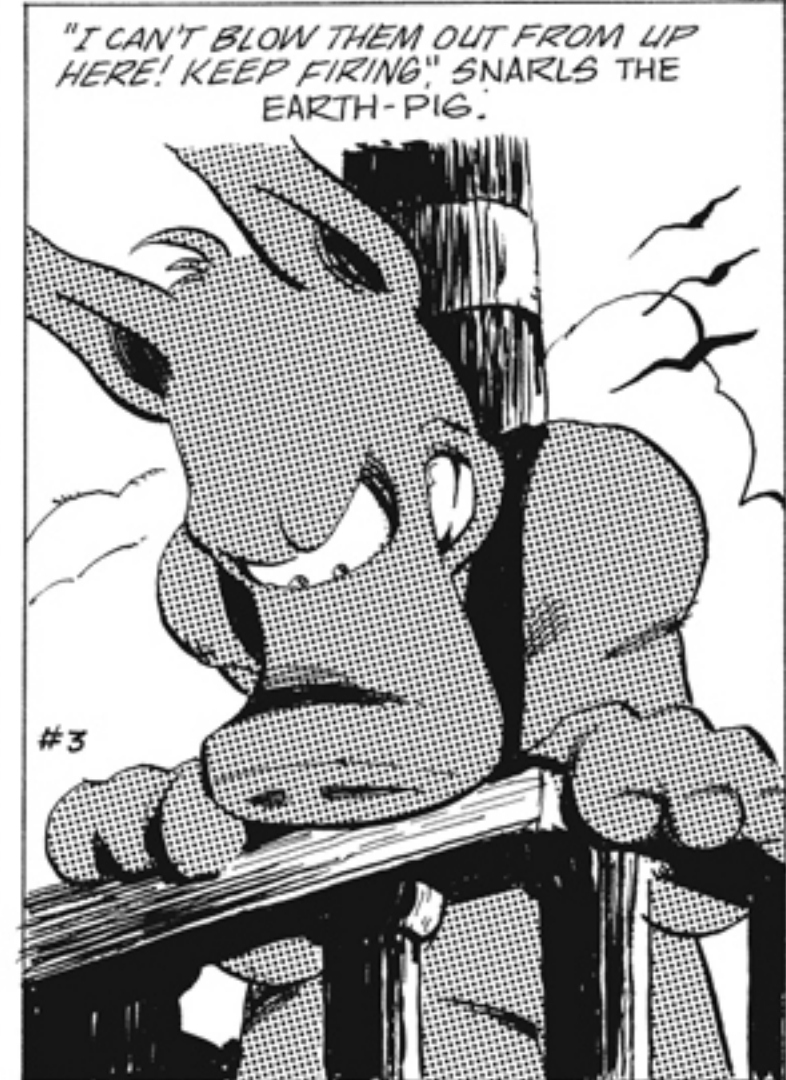
ABRUPTLY, "THEY HAVE A CATAPULT! FIREBALLS COMING THIS WAY--"



THE ARROWS, HOWEVER, CONTINUE TO FALL FAR SHORT OF THEIR INTENDED TARGET



"ABANDON SHIP" BELLOWS THE AARDVARK-- "GRAB ALL NECESSARY PROVISIONS"



"I CAN'T BLOW THEM OUT FROM UP HERE! KEEP FIRING" SNARLS THE EARTH-PIG.



AND, INSIDE OF AN HOUR, A MAKESHIFT BUCKET BRIGADE FIGHTS A LOSING BATTLE AGAINST THE INFERNO RAGING AMIDSHIPS



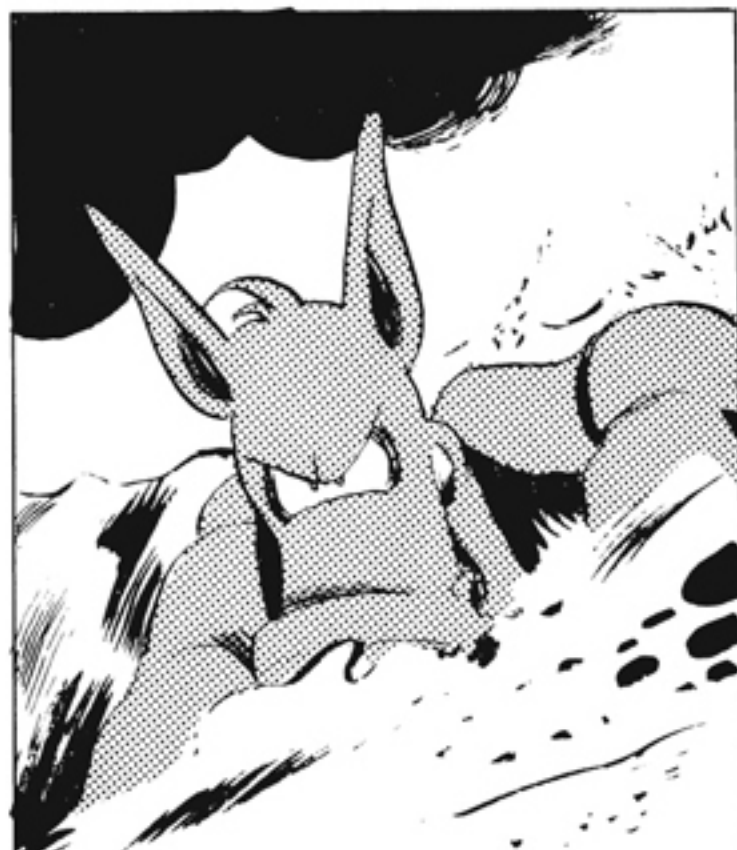
"YOU HEARD HIM," WHINES SILVERSPORN "SOMEONE GET MY CASE OF CHATEAU DEHRSION '26"

NEXT WEEK: SHIPWRECKED

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



CEREBUS WATCHES AS THE CUTTER SINKS BENEATH THE WAVES, BILLOWING STEAM MINGLING WITH OILY, BLACK SMOKE AS THE TRADE SHIP VANISHES FROM SIGHT. THOUGH HE LOOKS CAREFULLY FOR IT, THERE IS NO SIGN OF THE ONLIU PIRATE SHIP.



THE CREW, ELECTING TO ATTEMPT THE LONG VOYAGE TO PALNU IN OPEN BOATS, HAS TURNED WEST...



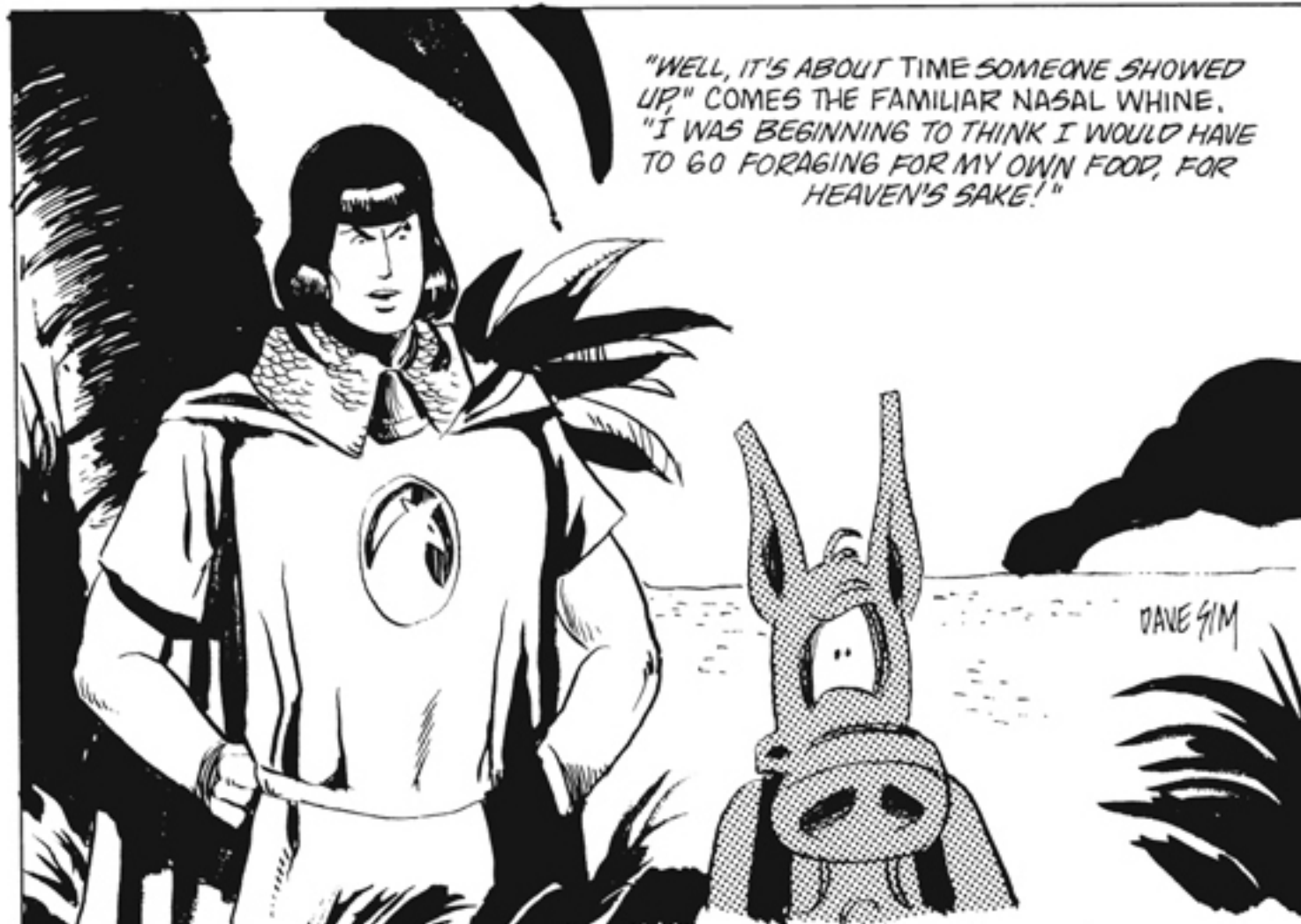
FEELING THE RISK TO BE TOO GREAT, CEREBUS CHOOSES A SMALL SUB-TROPICAL ISLAND AS HIS IMMEDIATE DESTINATION.



THOUGH UNSURE OF HIS OWN PLANS HE IS AT LEAST GRATEFUL TO BE RID OF THE ARROGANT AND INSUFFERABLE YOUNG SILVERSPORN



DOUBTLESS, HE HAS JOINED THE CUTTER IN ITS WATERY GRAVE. CEREBUS COULD PICTURE HIM, CLINGING TENACIOUSLY TO HIS WINE AND SPICE CRATES...



"WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME SOMEONE SHOWED UP" COMES THE FAMILIAR NASAL WHINE. "I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK I WOULD HAVE TO GO FORAGING FOR MY OWN FOOD, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE!"

DAVE SIM

NEXT : DIVISION OF LABOUR

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



"IF YOU THINK I INTEND TO FORAGE FOR YOUR MEALS AS WELL AS MY OWN," SNARLS THE EARTH-PIG.



SILVER SPOON CUTS HIM OFF. "NATURALLY MY FATHER WILL PAY YOU WHEN WE REACH PALNU... SHALL WE SAY A HUNDRED GOLD PIECES?"



"TWO HUNDRED!" SNAPS CEREBUS. "AGREED," SMILES SILVER SPOON.



AS HE MOVES OFF IN SEARCH OF SUSTENANCE, CEREBUS WONDERS IF HE HAS WON THE ARGUMENT -- OR LOST IT.



A NORTHERNER SINCE BIRTH, CEREBUS SOON FINDS FORAGING A MORE DIFFICULT TASK THAN HE HAD EXPECTED.



HE COULD SEPARATE THE POISONOUS FROM THE EDIBLE BASED ON SHADES OF GREEN AND BROWN, BUT WAS STYMIED BY THE RAINBOW COLOURED VEGETATION



"AT LEAST" MUTTERS THE EARTH-PIG TO HIMSELF "THAT EXPLAINS WHY HUMANS NEVER SETTLED ON THIS ISLAND."

NEXT: NATIVES

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



SYNOPSIS: IN EXCHANGE FOR TWO HUNDRED GOLD PIECES PROMISED HIM BY THE YOUNG LORD SILVERSPORN, CEREBUS HAS GONE FORAGING FOR THEIR EVENING MEAL. HIS QUEST IS INTERRUPTED BY TWO ARMED NATIVES



"FROM WHAT I GATHER, THEY WANT US TO GO WITH THEM TO THEIR VILLAGE," SAYS THE EARTH-PIG.



"TELL THEM WE'LL BRING OUT THE BEADS AND THE TRINKETS AFTER WE'VE EATEN," SAYS SILVERSPORN, WAVING OFF THE INTERRUPTION.



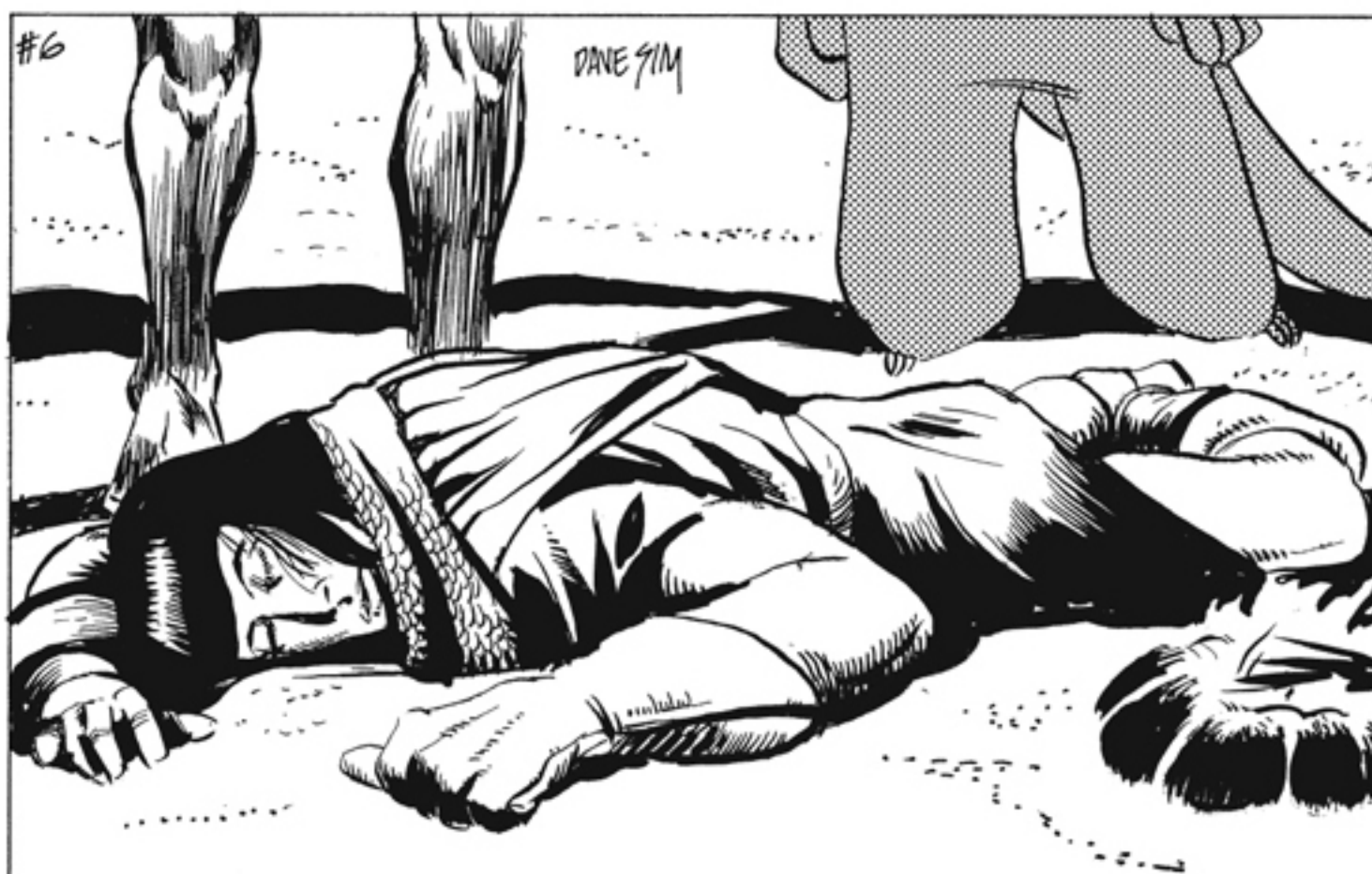
"I DON'T THINK THEY WANT TO WAIT THAT LONG" SAYS CEREBUS, RAISING HIS VOICE SLIGHTLY.



"OH, PIFFLE, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LET THESE IGNORANT SAVAGES PUSH YOU AROUND ARE YOU?" ASKS SILVERSPORN, "TELL THEM TO SHOO!"



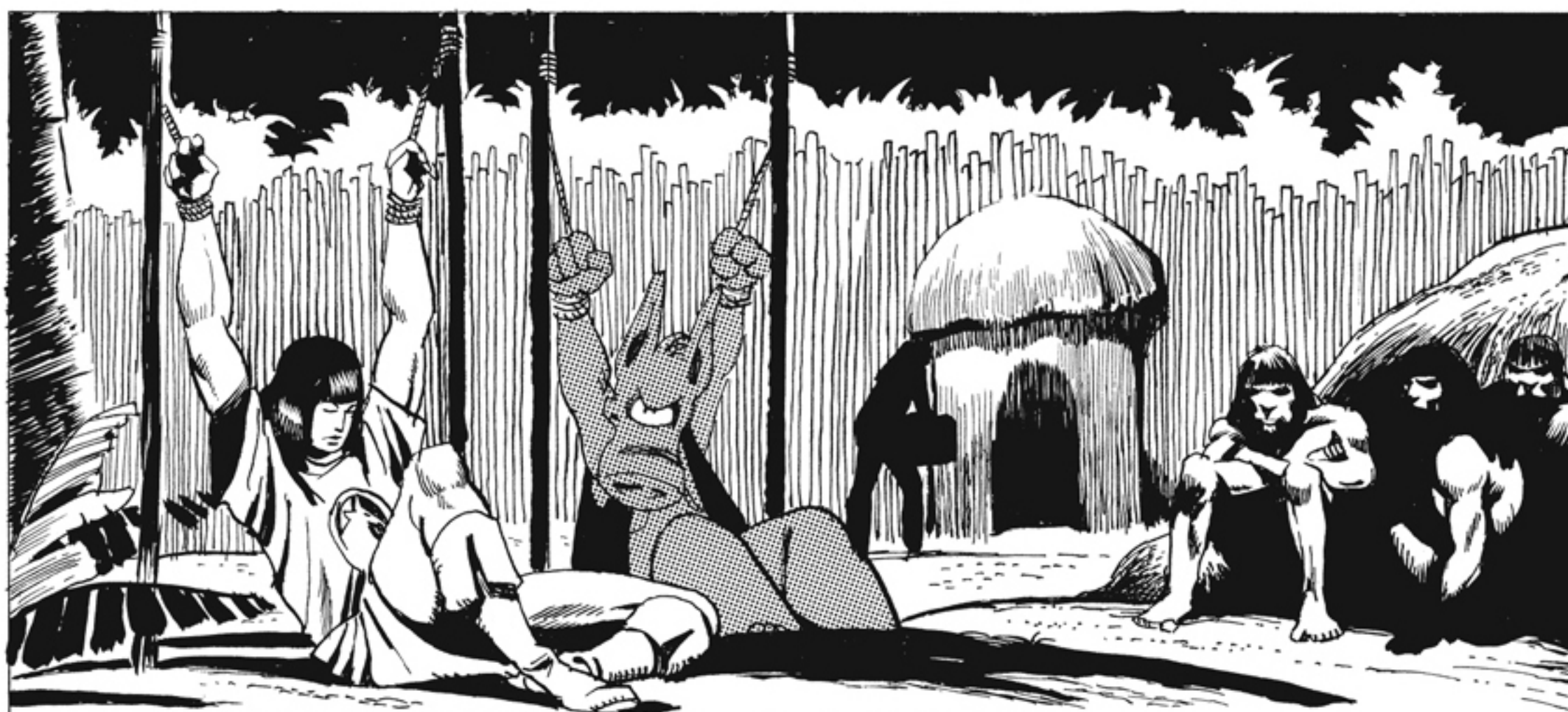
"CRACK!" SAYS A ROCK AND SILVERSPORN'S FOREHEAD IN UNISON.



"NOW WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?" PONDERES CEREBUS ALOUD.

NEXT: FUN AND GAMES

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



SILVERSPOON RETURNS TO CONSCIOUSNESS OVER A PERIOD OF SEVERAL MINUTES, AT LAST RECOGNIZING THE BUZZING IN HIS EARS AS CEREBUS' VOICE "WE'VE BEEN TAKEN CAPTIVE, BRAT," GROWLS THE EARTH-PIG, "TRY NOT TO MAKE THEM ANY ANGRIER, OKAY"



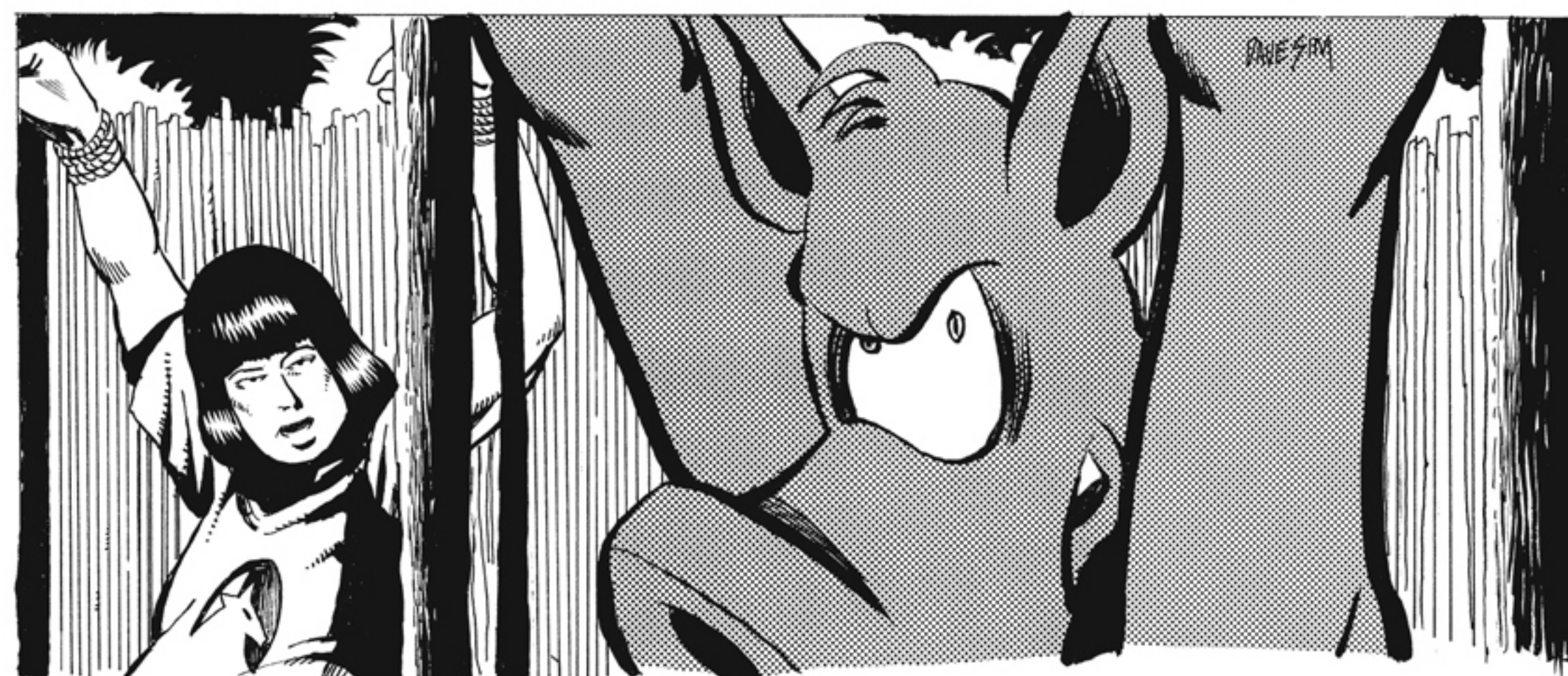
"RAGGA RAGGA NIMU LUM TUM DIDDY YAH-YAH," SUGGESTS ONE OF THE NATIVES.



"UM TUT SUT LIM LUM BUBBA BUB BUBA BOO" DISAGREES HIS COMPANION.



"SHA-BOOM SHA-BOOM," OPINES A THIRD MEMBER OF THE GROUP.



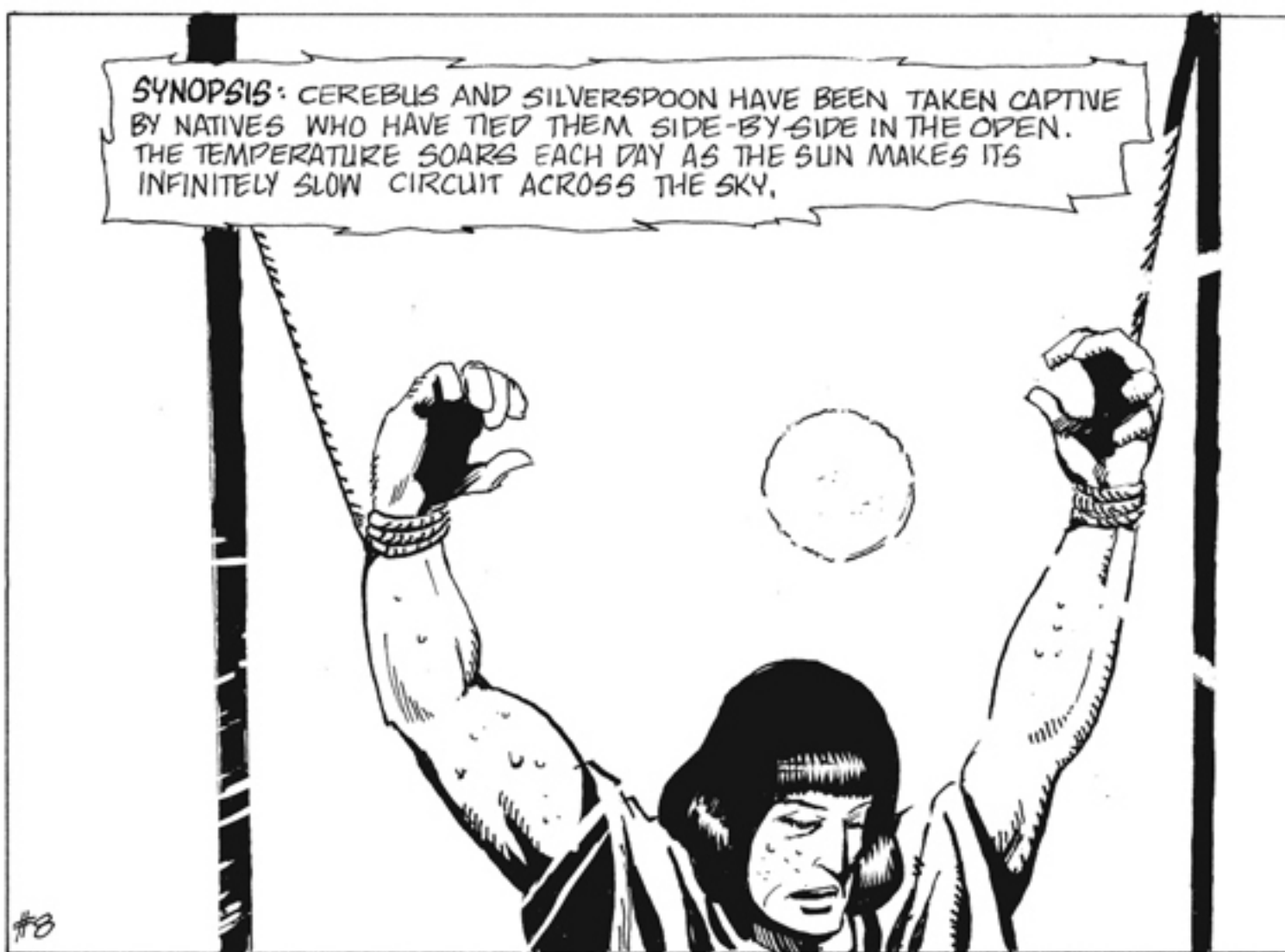
"WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?" ASKS SILVERSPOON. "THEY'RE BETTING ON WHAT WILL GET US FIRST-- EXPOSURE OR STARVATION," ANSWERS CEREBUS.

NEXT: A STICKY WICKET

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



SYNOPSIS: CEREBUS AND SILVERSPOON HAVE BEEN TAKEN CAPTIVE BY NATIVES WHO HAVE TIED THEM SIDE-BY-SIDE IN THE OPEN. THE TEMPERATURE SOARS EACH DAY AS THE SUN MAKES ITS INFINITELY SLOW CIRCUIT ACROSS THE SKY.



LATE EVENING BRINGS THE POUNDING OF MIDSUMMER RAINS, DRENCHING THE LANDSCAPE AS THE SUN SINKS FROM VIEW.



THEN, THE LONG HOURS OF NIGHT AND NEAR-FREEZING TEMPERATURES UNDER A STAR-FILLED SKY...



AS THE SUN BEGINS ITS RISE ONCE MORE INSECTS FEED ON HUMAN AND AARDVARK FLESH...



FOUR DAYS! CEREBUS WAS USED TO SUCH HARSH CONDITIONS BUT WHAT OF THE CITY-BRED BRAT? HOW LONG COULD HE LAST?



"CHATEAU DEHRSION '26," GASPS YOUNG SILVERSPOON, FROM BETWEEN PARCHED LIPS, "CHATEAU DEHRSION '26"



"HE MAY BE ON THE VERGE OF DEATH," MUSES CEREBUS "BUT HIS BREEDING IS IMPECCABLE."

NEXT: DADDY

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



OUR STORY: CEREBUS WAKES TO THE SOUND OF SPLINTERING BAMBOO. ARMED SOLDIERS ARE BREAKING INTO THE SMALL VILLAGE, THE BRONZE-SKINNED NATIVES DROPPING LIKE FLIES IN THE FACE OF SWORDS AND CROSSBOWS. "HEY, BRAT," GRUMBLES THE EARTH-PIG, "VISITORS." "DADDY" CRIES SILVERSPOON, HIS EYES SHINING WITH DELIGHT.



"DADDY?" QUERIES THE EARTH-PIG. "OF COURSE, SILLY" REPLIES THE YOUNG HEIR, "IT'S DADDY AND HIS TROOPS COME TO RESCUE ME."



"OVER HERE, DADDY," CRIES SILVERSPOON. CEREBUS CAN HARDLY BELIEVE HIS GOOD LUCK! SOON HE WOULD BE RID OF THE BRAT AND HAVE HIS REWARD FOR SAVING THE BOY'S LIFE.



"HE'LL PROBABLY KILL YOU WHEN I TELL HIM HOW YOU KIDNAPPED ME" INTONES SILVERSPOON AS A SLENDER MAN APPROACHES...

NEXT: OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

Cerebus THE AARDVARK



OUR STORY: SILVERSPORN'S FATHER ARRIVES WITH ARMED SOLDIERS TO RESCUE THE YOUNG HEIR. AS HIS BONDS ARE SEVERED, HE RELATES A GRIM (AND ENTIRELY FICTITIOUS) TALE OF HIS KIDNAPPING BY CEREBUS THE AARDVARK.



"HE REALLY DID, DADDY, I PROMISE, REALLY! LET ME EXECUTE HIM, PLEASE! PLEASE! I HAVEN'T EXECUTED ANYONE IN WEEKS" WHINES YOUNG SILVERSPORN.



"UH -- HOW ABOUT IF WE WAIT UNTIL THIS LITTLE SITUATION IS ALL CLEARED UP BEFORE WE..."



"NO NO NO!" SHRIEKS SILVERSPORN STAMPING AN ARISTOCRATIC BOOT ON THE GROUND. "YOU'RE JUST STALLING! YOU NEVER LET ME HAVE ANY FUN ANYMORE! IT'S NOT FAIR! IT'S NOT FAIR! IT'S NOT..."



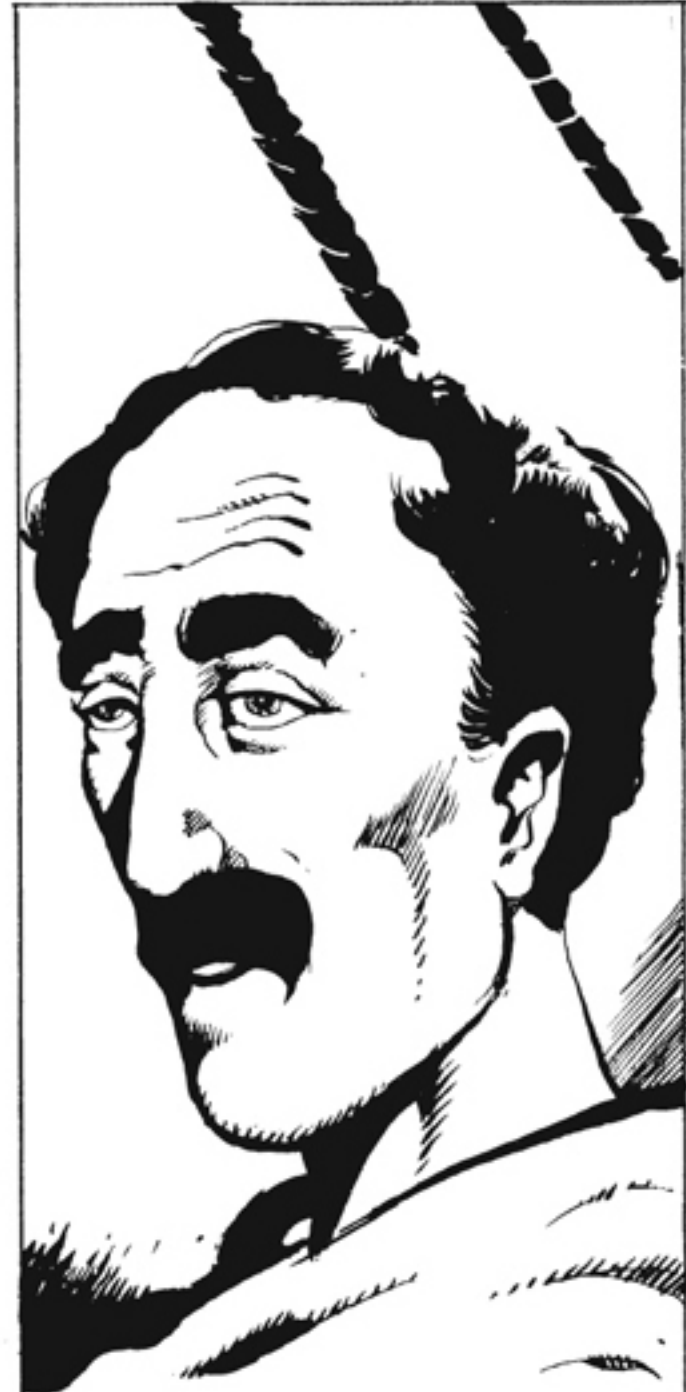
"NICE THROWING" SAYS LORD JULIUS TO ONE OF HIS MEN. "GLXXP" SAYS SILVERSPORN JUST BEFORE LAPSING INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS.

NEXT: PEACE and QUIET

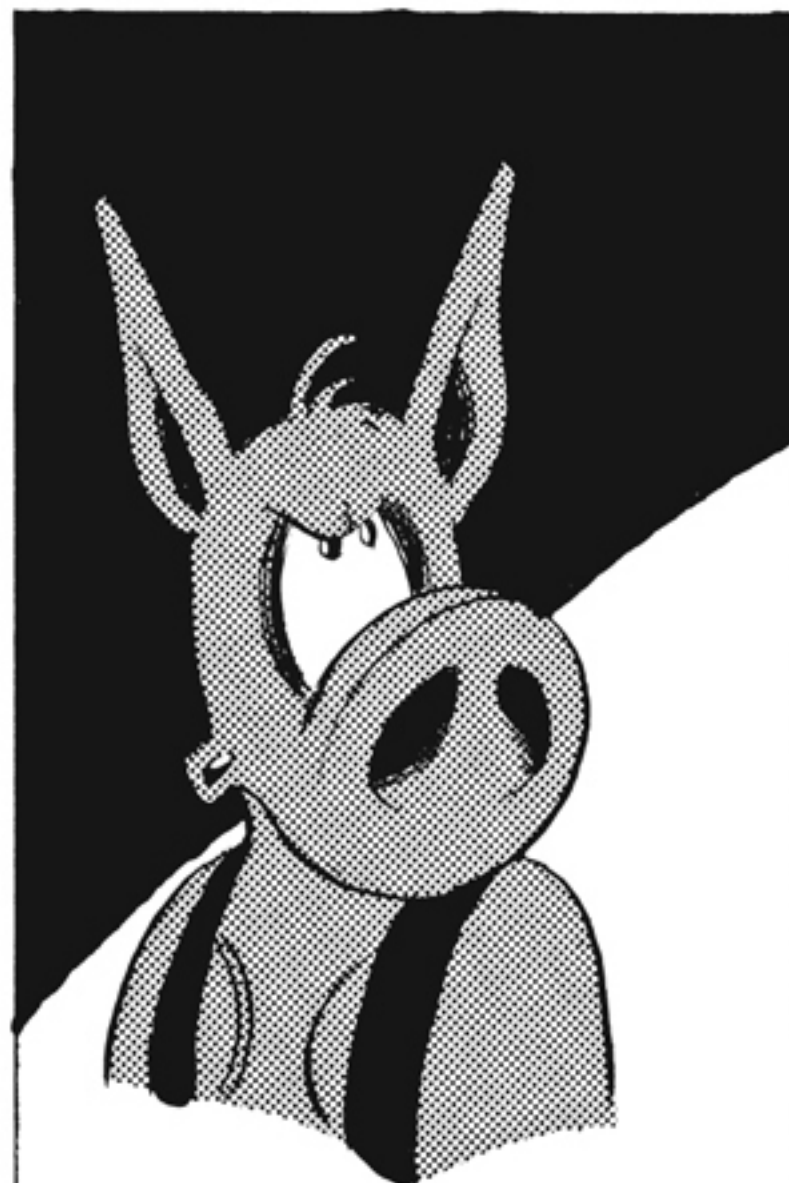
Cerebus THE AARDVARK



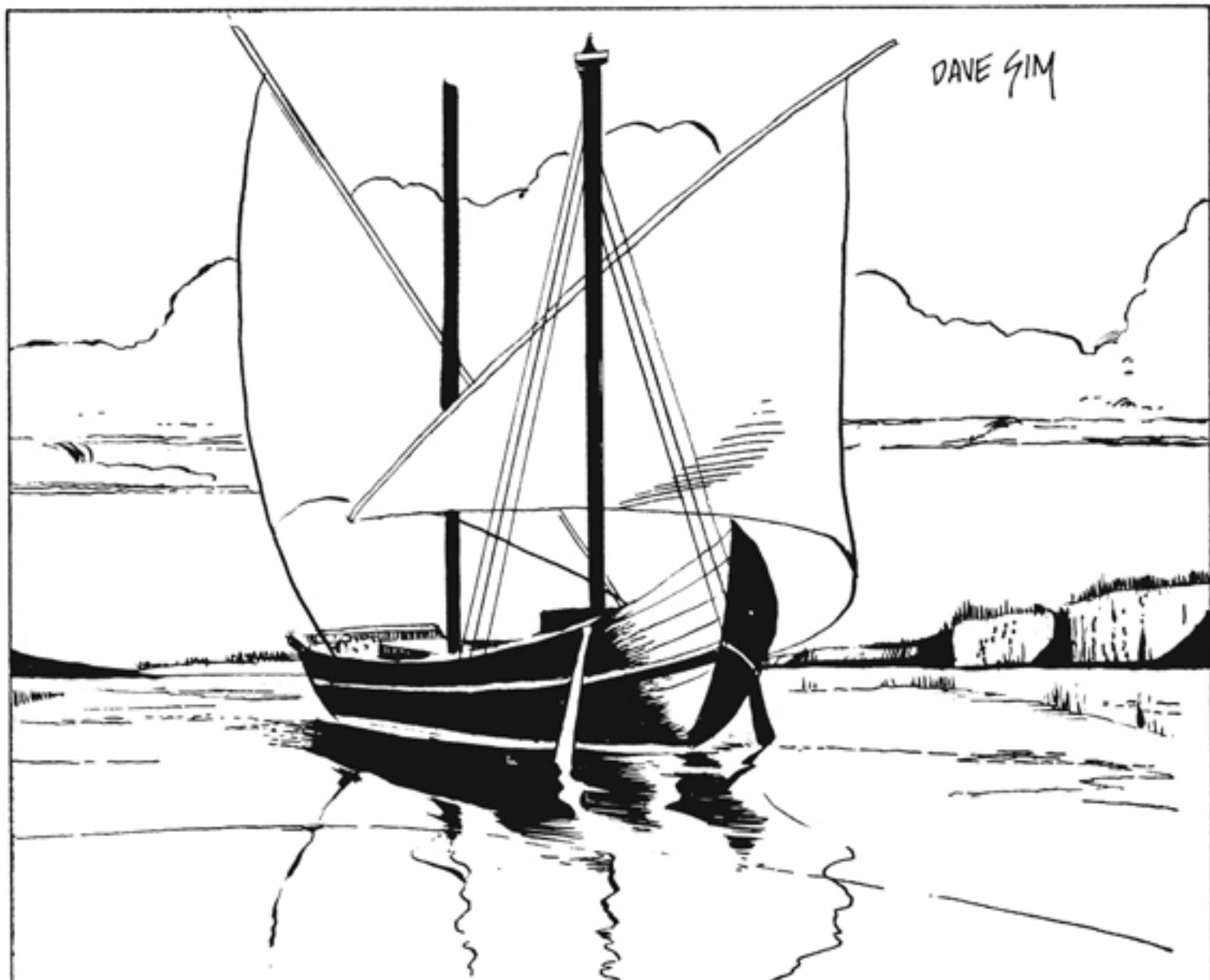
OUR STORY: CEREBUS WATCHES AS SILVERSPORN IS LOADED ABOARD THE SHIP SOON TO BE BOUND FOR PALNU. HIS FATHER, LORD JULIUS, HAS OFFERED TO GIVE CEREBUS FREE PASSAGE ON THE VESSEL AND PROMISES THAT A REWARD AWAITS THE EARTH-PIG WHEN THEY REACH PORT "WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE BK... uh... SILVERSPORN WHEN HE WAKES UP," ASKS CEREBUS.



"I HADN'T REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT IT" ADMITS LORD JULIUS, "I SUPPOSE I'LL SEND HIM TO A BOY'S MILITARY SCHOOL..."



"BUT SILVERSPORN HAS TRAVELLED THE WORLD," VENTURES CEREBUS "WON'T A BOY'S SCHOOL BE A LITTLE BIT... WELL... BORING?"



DAVE GIM

"YOU KNOW, YOU'RE RIGHT," AGREES JULIUS -- "MAYBE I'LL SEND HIM TO A GIRL'S SCHOOL INSTEAD..."

NEXT: A NEW ADVENTURE

cerebus the aardvark

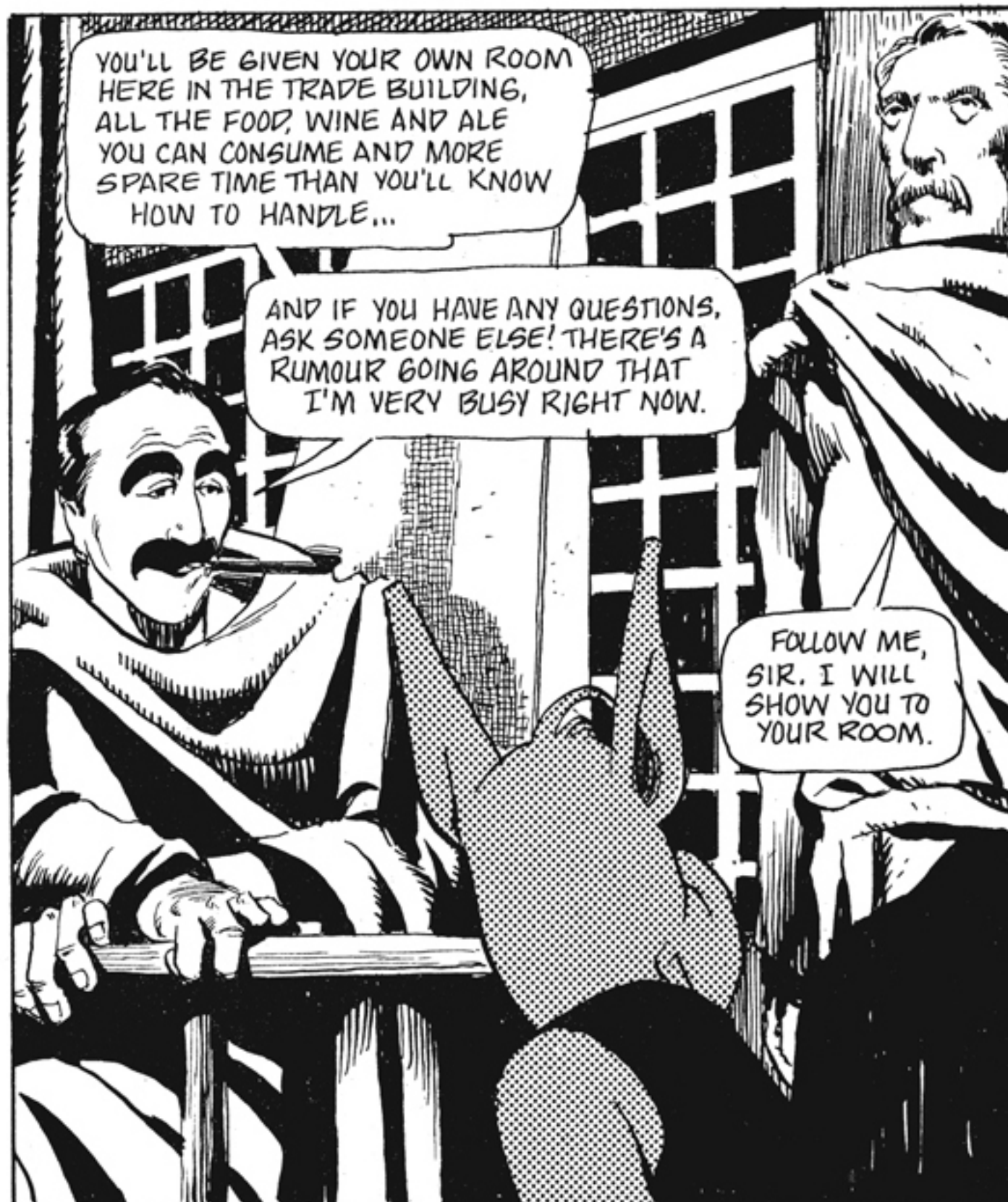
SYNOPSIS: AFTER LEAVING LOWER FELDA, CEREBUS BOARDS A TRADING VESSEL BOUND FOR PALNU! WHEN THE SHIP IS WAYLAID BY ONLIU PIRATES, CEREBUS AND THE SON OF THE DIRECTOR OF TRADE (AND ELECTED RULER) OF PALNU ARE SHIPWRECKED ON A DESERT ISLAND! RESCUED BY THE BOY'S FATHER AND HIS TROOPS, CEREBUS IS PROMISED A REWARD FOR SAVING THE YOUNG HEIR'S LIFE! THREE WEEKS LATER, THEY ARRIVE IN PALNU TO A TUMULTUOUS HERO'S WELCOME...

THE WALLS OF Palnu







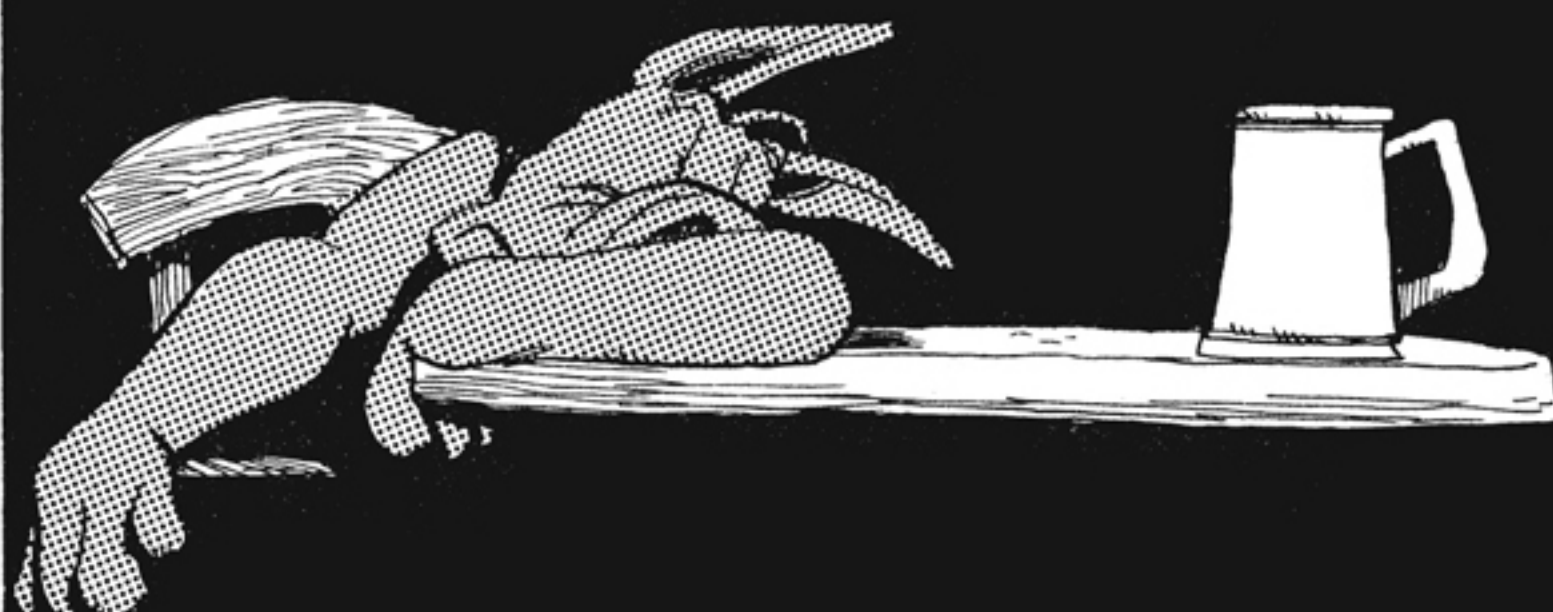


CEREBUS HAD NEVER BEEN TO PALNU, BUT, IN THE COURSE OF HIS TRAVELS, HAD HEARD MUCH ABOUT IT! MOST OUTLANDERS DWELT AT SOME LENGTH ON ITS SIZE AND WEALTH! SINCE HE HAD DECIDED TO REMAIN HERE, HE WOULD NEED TO KNOW MORE! THERE WAS AN EXPRESSION IN SERREA; "WHEN THE DRUNKARD SPEAKS THE SOBER MAN LEARNS MUCH." WITHIN THE HOUR, CEREBUS HAD LOCATED A SUITABLE BUREAUCRAT AT THE "FROG AND DUCK" AND, FOR THE PRICE OF A FEW TANKARDS, IS SOON UP TO HIS MEDALLIONS IN INFORMATION. THE ARISTOCRACY HAD ALL BUT VANISHED IN PALNU! BOUND AS THEY WERE TO THEIR ENORMOUS ESTATES, THEY WERE NO COMPETITION FOR THE THRIVING MERCHANT CLASS WHOSE ASSETS NOW GENERATED UNDREAMT-OF INCOME. THERE WERE FIVE DOMINANT MERCHANT "HOUSES" WITHIN THE CITY WALLS. THESE HOUSES EMPLOYED "CLIENTS," EACH CITIZEN OF VOTING AGE BEING A CLIENT, THEIR LIVING EXPENSES PAID BY THE HOUSE "LORD" IN EXCHANGE FOR THEIR VOTE. THE LORD, BY PAYING FOR THESE VOTES, ASSURED HIMSELF OF A PLACE ON THE "GRAND COUNCIL OF PALNU." THE LORD WHO OWNED THE MOST CLIENTS, AND, HENCE, VOTES WAS MADE "GRANDLORD" OF THE CITY AND ITS SURROUNDING TERRITORY! AT THE MOMENT, THIS WAS LORD JULIUS. THE WRINKLE THAT JULIUS HAD ADDED TO THIS IDEA WAS THE SELLING OF TITLES FOR ADDITIONAL REVENUE. THE LORDS OF THE NOUVEAU RICHE MERCHANT HOUSES, HAVING, SOME TIME BEFORE, RUN OUT OF THINGS TO BUY, NOW FILLED JULIUS' COFFERS IN EXCHANGE FOR THE TITLE OF THEIR CHOICE. THESE THEY HANDED OUT LIKE PARTY FAVOURS TO CONCUBINES, FAMILY BODYGUARDS, ACCOUNTANTS, NIECES, NEPHEWS AND, OF COURSE, THEMSELVES. JULIUS HIMSELF WAS GRANDLORD SUPREME, BARON OF THE HOUSE OF TAVERS, RIGHT HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER OF PALNU, PRESIDENT OF PARMOC, COUNT OF CIHNU.

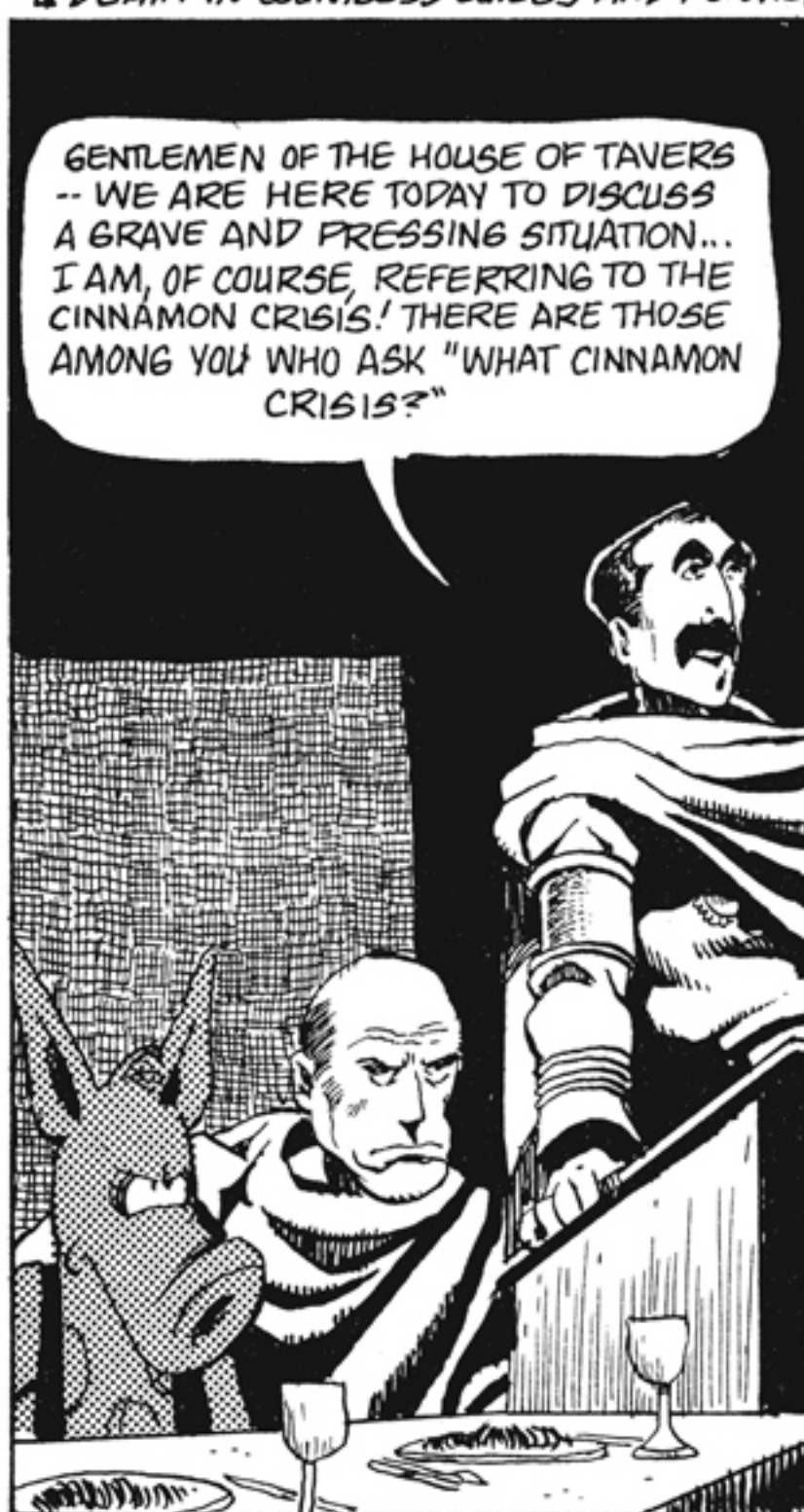
THERE WERE A NUMBER OF OTHER TITLES HE HAD PAID FOR BUT CEREBUS HAD FORGOTTEN ANOTHER SERREAN EXPRESSION.

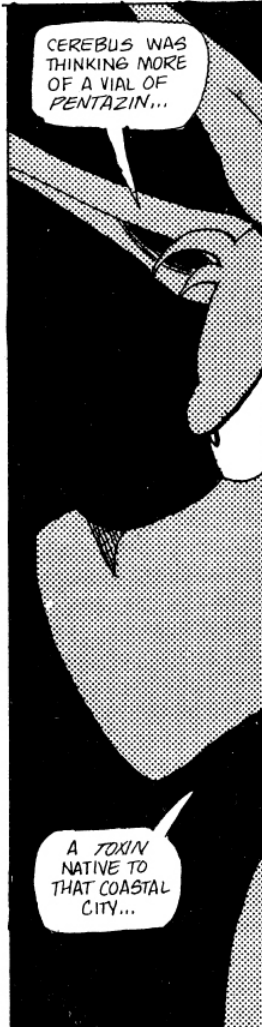
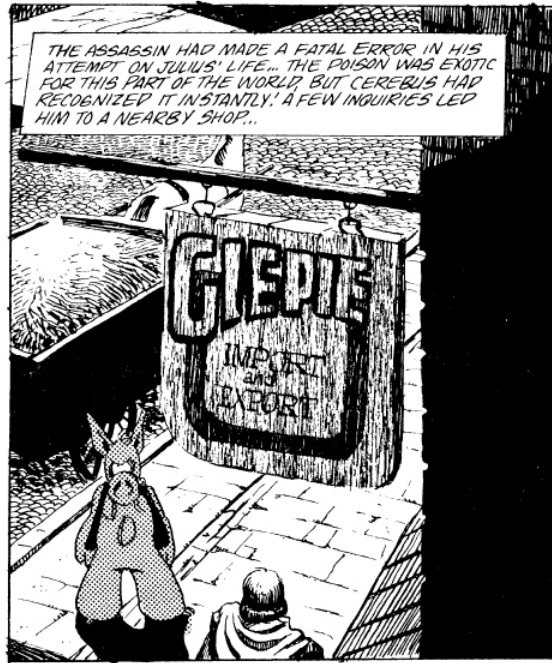


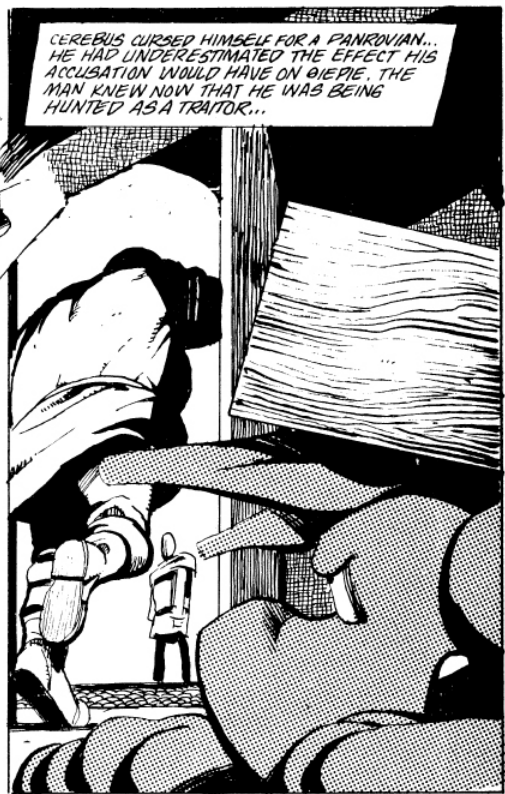
"WHEN THE BUREAUCRAT SPEAKS, THE SOUND OF SNORING SOON FILLS THE ROOM."



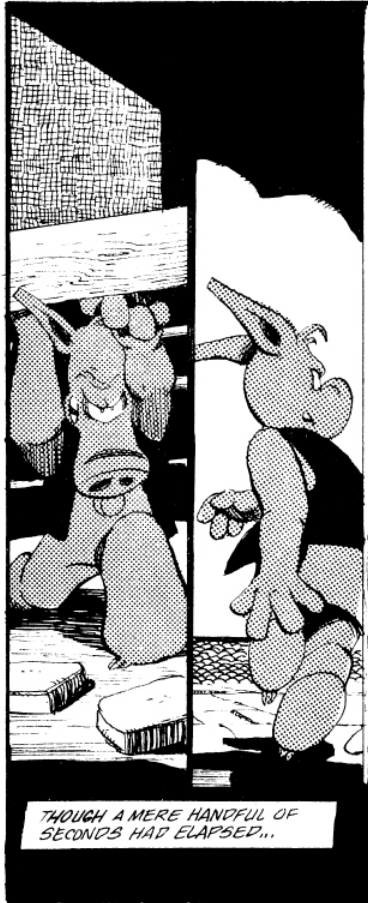
THE ENSUING WEEKS PASS LIKE MOLASSES THROUGH AN HOURGLASS! CEREBUS HAS KNOWN ADVERSITY AND HARDSHIP HAS FACED DEATH IN COUNTLESS GUISES AND FORMS; NONE CAN COMPARE WITH THE LIVING DEATH OF BOREDOM AT THE CORE OF A BUREAUCRACY...







CEREBUS CURSED HIMSELF FOR A PANROVIAN... HE HAD UNDERESTIMATED THE EFFECT HIS ACCUSATION WOULD HAVE ON GIEPTE, THE MAN KNEW NOW THAT HE WAS BEING HUNTED AS A TRAITOR...



THOUGH A MERE HANDFUL OF SECONDS HAD ELAPSED...

ALREADY THE STREET HAD SWALLOWED UP HIS CORPULENT QUARRY...



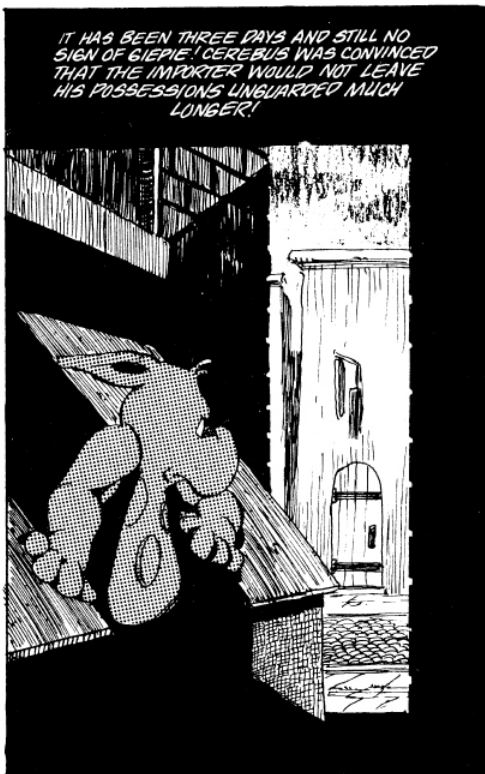
AN HOUR LATER...

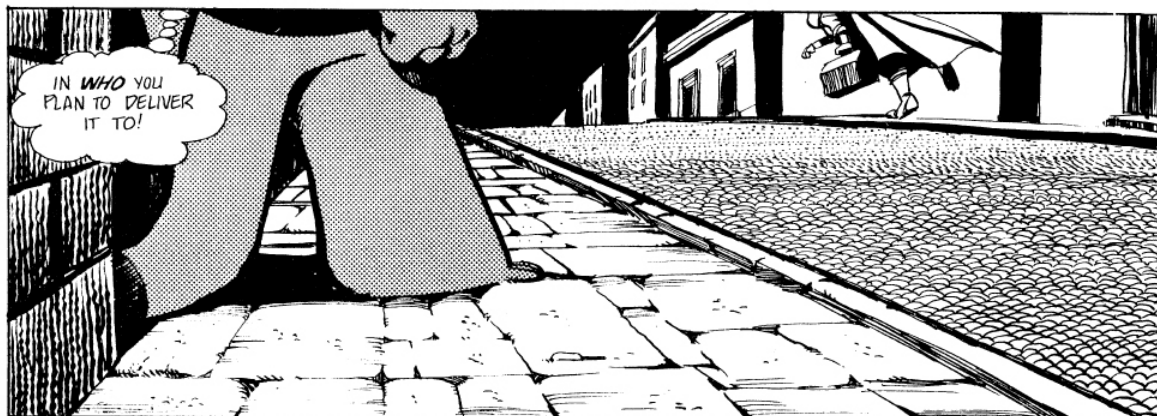
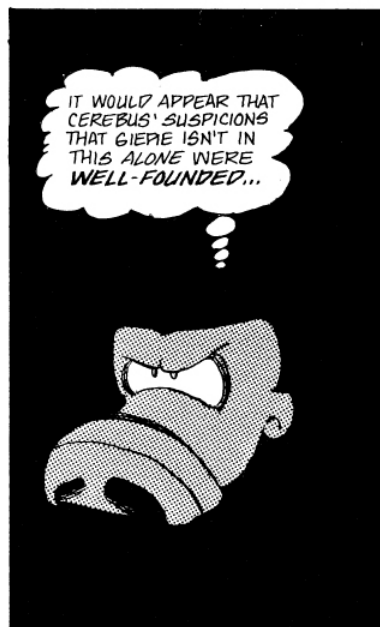
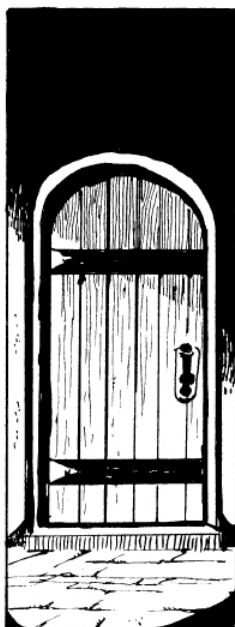
ONE OF MY IMPORTERS... AN ASSASSIN?

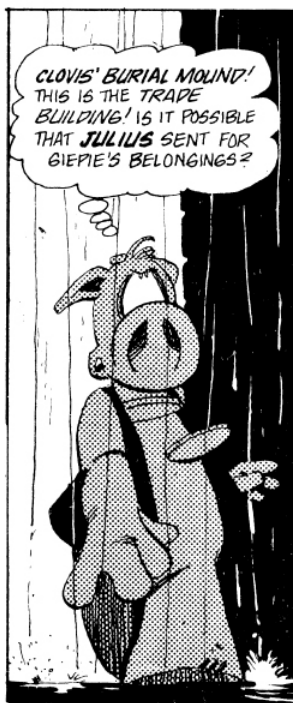
SEND FOR THE ARMY!

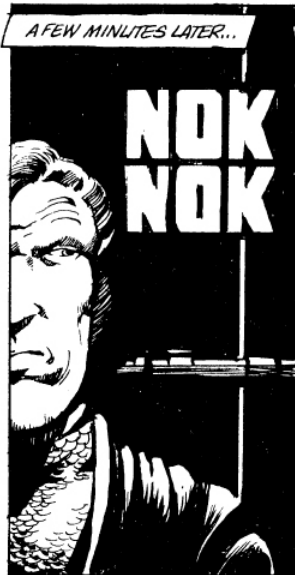
WAIT!

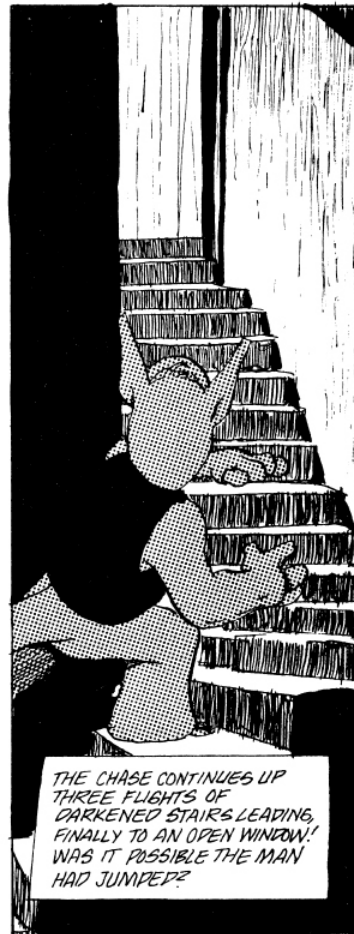
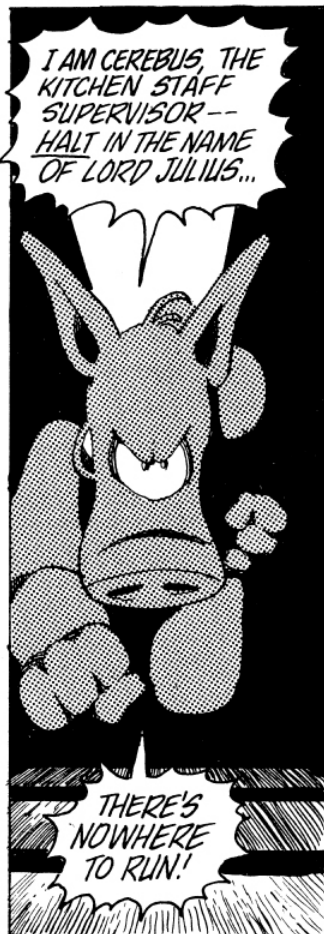
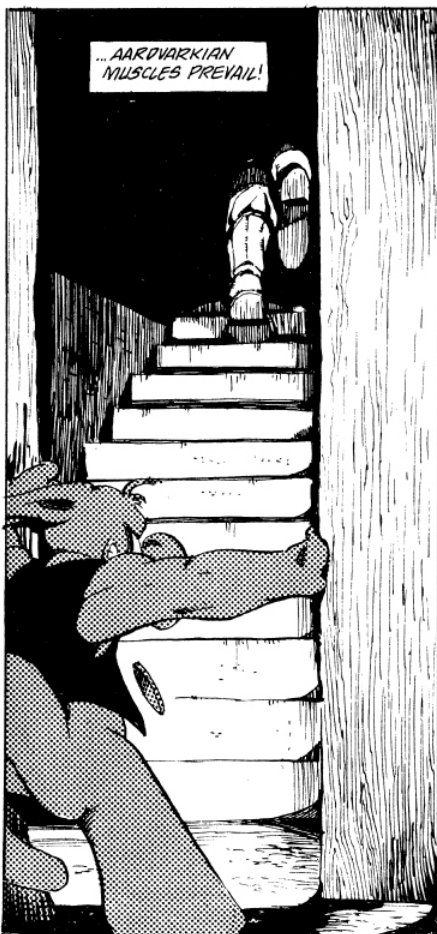
LORD JULIUS--THESE MATTERS ARE BEST HANDLED QUIETLY...!











AS CEREBUS LOOKED OUT AND DOWN, HE DREW A SHARP BREATH--ALREADY THE MAN WAS MAKING HIS WAY--DOWN THE FACE OF THE BUILDING!

CEREBUS HAD FORGOTTEN THE ORNATE DESIGN OF PALNU'S BUILDINGS! THERE WERE SUFFICIENT HANDHOLDS FOR A GOOD CLIMBER TO ESCAPE ALONG FIVE CITY BLOCKS WITHOUT ONCE TOUCHING PAVING STONES...

IF CEREBUS LOST HIM NOW, THERE WERE COUNTLESS HIDING PLACES IN A CITY OF THIS SIZE...

AND THE DEADLY GAME BEGINS...

AS HE CLIMBS, CEREBUS LOOKS FOR ANY UNEXPECTED CHANCES--FOR, NOT ONLY DOES HE HAVE TO CLIMB DOWN SAFELY...

...HIS MIND MADE UP, CEREBUS BEGINS HIS PURSUIT...

BUT HE MUST ALSO FIND SOME WAY TO MAKE UP THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS QUARRY!



A FLAGPOLE AND A WIDER SECTION OF LEDGE PROVIDE THE ANSWER...



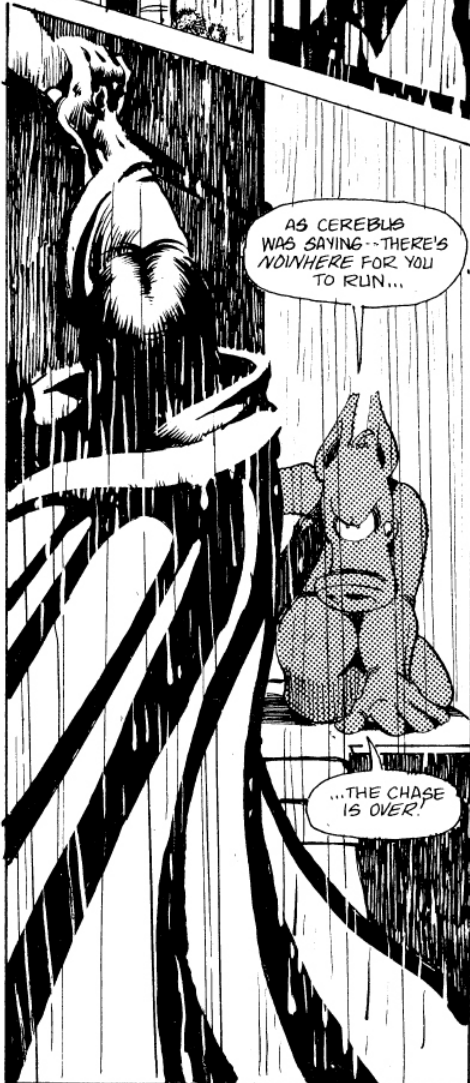
THE POLE BENDS UNDER HIS WEIGHT.



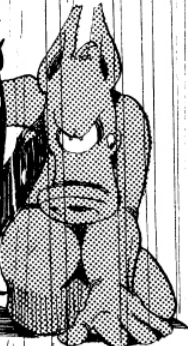
HE SWINGS OUTWARD, ARCHING HIS BACK...



...AND LANDS--BLOCKING HIS FOE'S ROUTE OF ESCAPE!



AS CEREBUS WAS SAYING--THERE'S NOWHERE FOR YOU TO RUN...



...THE CHASE IS OVER!



YOU FOOL! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING!



CEREBUS IS DOING THE JOB HE IS PAID TO DO!

...STOPPING ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS!



YOU'VE SAVED THE LIFE OF A DESPOT WHO IS BRINGING THIS CITY TO THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION!



JOIN US!... THE REVOLUTION HAS NEED OF TRUE **PATRIOTS** WHO WISH TO RESTORE PALNU TO HER FORMER GREATNESS!

YOUR PLEAS FALL ON DEAF EARS, **STRIPLING!**



CEREBUS HAS A JOB TO DO NO MORE AND NO LESS. IF THE PRICE WAS RIGHT, HE WOULD FOLLOW A WOOD FAERIE IN A RELIGIOUS CRUSADE AGAINST THE ONLIU...



THE LEADER YOU FOLLOW-- THE LEADER WHOSE **BOLD** YOU ACCEPT SO **WILLINGLY...**



HOW'D YOU BOYS LIKE TO GO PLAY SOMEWHERE **ELSE** -- I HAVE SOME TRADE AGREEMENTS THAT I HAVE TO...

OH! IT'S YOU!

TELL ME -- HOW'S EVERY LITTLE THING IN THE KITCHEN?



CEREBUS HAS FOUND YOUR ASSASSIN...

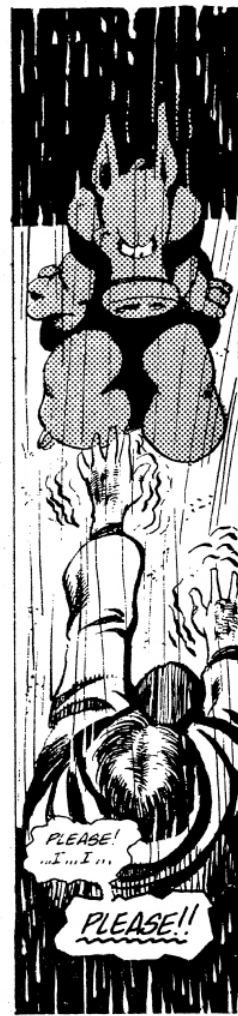
WELL, WELL, WELL SO YOU HAVE



I'D ASK YOU BOTH IN FOR A DRINK BUT IT'S GETTING AWFULLY LATE AND I HAVE TO GET UP FOR WORK TOMORROW...









A DAY IN THE PITS

SYNOPSIS: HAVING BROKEN UP A MEETING OF REVOLUTIONARIES (SEE LAST ISSUE) THINGS SETTLE DOWN FOR CEREBUS IN HIS ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF SECURITY FORCES IN PALNU. AFTER A TIME, HOWEVER, RENEWED EVIDENCE OF REBEL ATTACKS ON THE BUREAUCRACY INDICATE THAT THE REVOLUTIONARY FORCES ARE MORE WIDESPREAD THAN WAS ORIGINALLY THOUGHT, PROMPTING CEREBUS TO CALL ON LORD JULIUS...

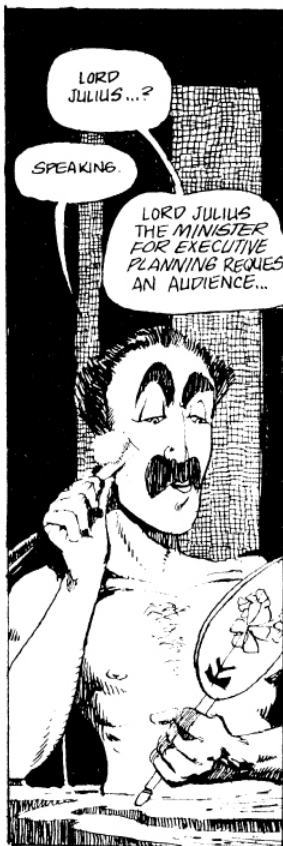
IN SHORT, LORD JULIUS, THE
REVOLUTIONARIES YOU HOLD
IN YOUR PRISON ARE A SMALL
PART OF A MUCH LARGER GROUP

PROBABLY
DIRECTED BY A
LEADER WITH A
GREAT...

UNHAND ME!
I AM A PRIEST OF
THE LIVING TARIM...

...AND I
DEMAND TO
SEE LORD
JULIUS!!





LORD JULIUS...?

SPEAKING.

LORD JULIUS THE MINISTER FOR EXECUTIVE PLANNING REQUESTS AN AUDIENCE...



NOT A CHANCE--THE LAST TIME I GAVE HIM AN AUDIENCE, HE JUST STOOD THERE AND STUTTERED UNTIL EVERYONE WALKED OUT ON HIM...



NO, NO -- HE WISHES TO **SPEAK** WITH YOU, LORD JULIUS...

WELL, WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO...?

CANCEL THE AUDIENCE AND SHOW HIM IN...



MINISTER FOR EXECUTIVE PLANNING?

ONE OF MY STENOGRAPHERS... THE CABINET TITLE IS STRICTLY HONORARY...

... IN HONOUR OF WHAT?

IN HONOUR OF HIS PAYING TWO HUNDRED PIECES A MONTH TO USE IT...

I SENT HIM TO THE TORTURE CHAMBER TO RECORD ANY INFORMATION WE CAN SQUEEZE OUT OF THOSE REBELS...



THE MINISTER FOR EXECUTIVE PLANNING, M'LORD!

BASKIN, MY BOY...

COME IN, COME IN!



READ ME WHAT YOU HAVE SO FAR...

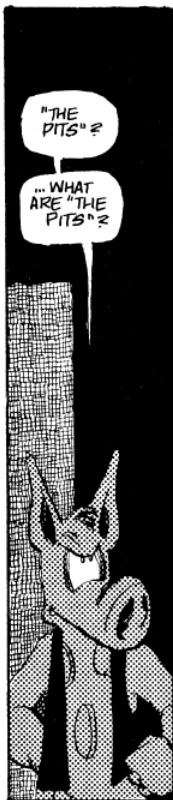
"AAAGH"

"NO. NO. NO"

"AIEEEEE OH-NO. AAG AAAAAH"

"AAAAAAA AAAA6GH!"





"THE PITS"?

...WHAT ARE "THE PITS"?



THE PITS?

WHY... THE PITS ARE...



WHEN YOU BOYS ARE THROUGH PLAYING "STUMP THE STENOGRAPHER"...

...LET ME KNOW AND I'LL ORGANIZE SOME NEW GAMES...



ON SECOND THOUGHT, THIS MIGHT BE A GOOD TIME FOR YOU TO TRY OUT YOUR COVER AS KITCHEN STAFF SUPERVISOR...

YOU COULD BASTE THE COOK OR SOMETHING...

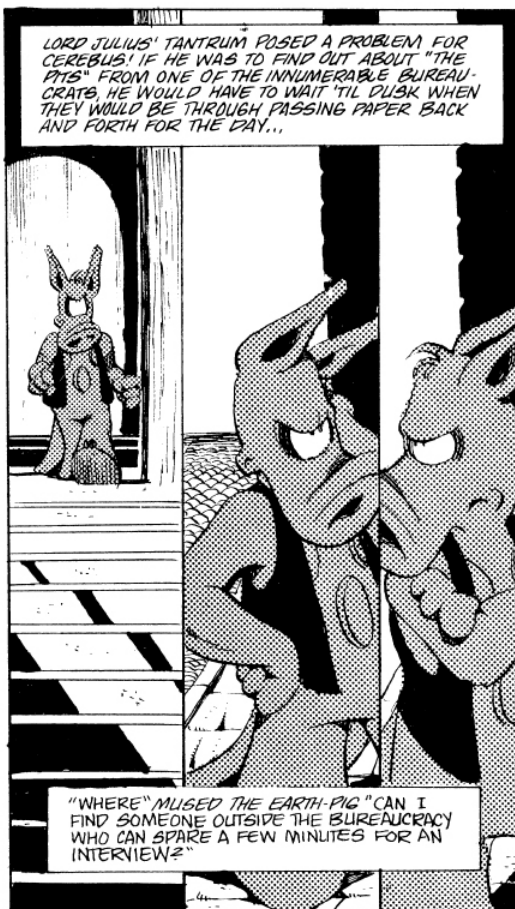


I SHOULD HAVE WARNED YOU... LORD JULIUS DOES NOT PERMIT HIS EMPLOYEES TO SPEAK TOGETHER EXCEPT THROUGH HIM...

HE BELIEVES THAT IT CAUSES MUCH DISSATISFACTION IN THE CITY...

HOW DOES ANYTHING GET DONE?

THIS IS A BUREAUCRACY, SIR... NOTHING IS SUPPOSED TO GET DONE!



LORD JULIUS' TANTRUM POSED A PROBLEM FOR CEREBUS! IF HE WAS TO FIND OUT ABOUT "THE PITS" FROM ONE OF THE INNUMERABLE BUREAUCRATS, HE WOULD HAVE TO WAIT 'TIL DUSK WHEN THEY WOULD BE THROUGH PASSING PAPER BACK AND FORTH FOR THE DAY...

"WHERE" MUSED THE EARTH-PIG "CAN I FIND SOMEONE OUTSIDE THE BUREAUCRACY WHO CAN SPARE A FEW MINUTES FOR AN INTERVIEW?"



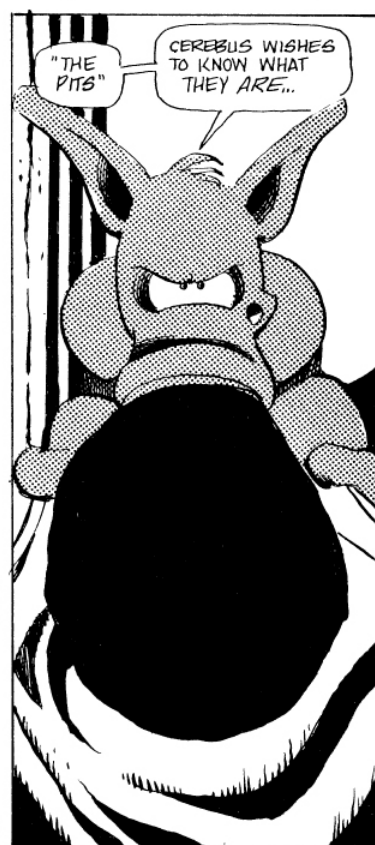
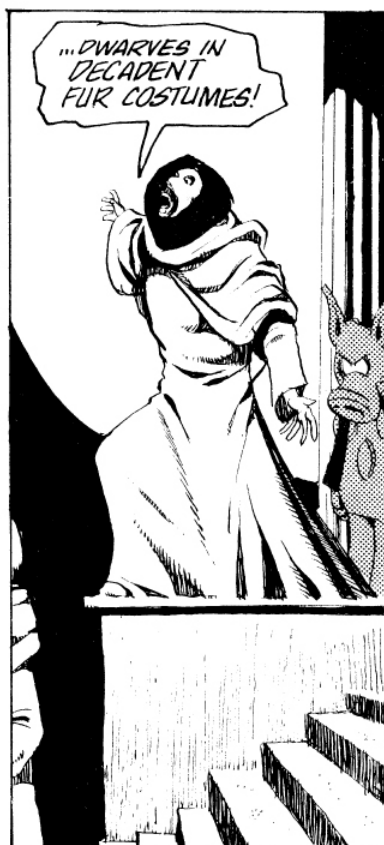
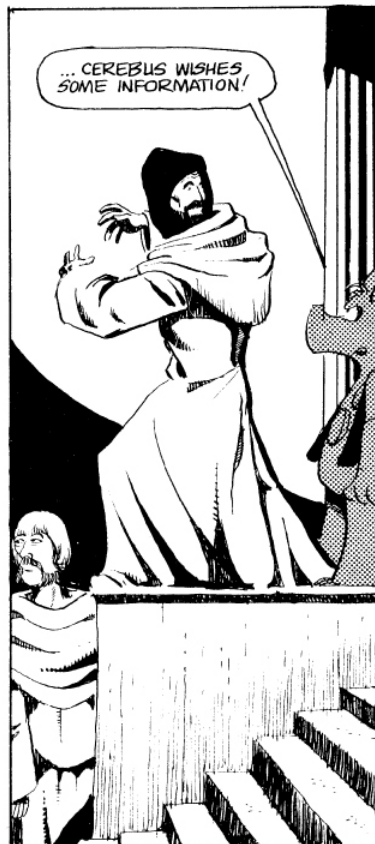
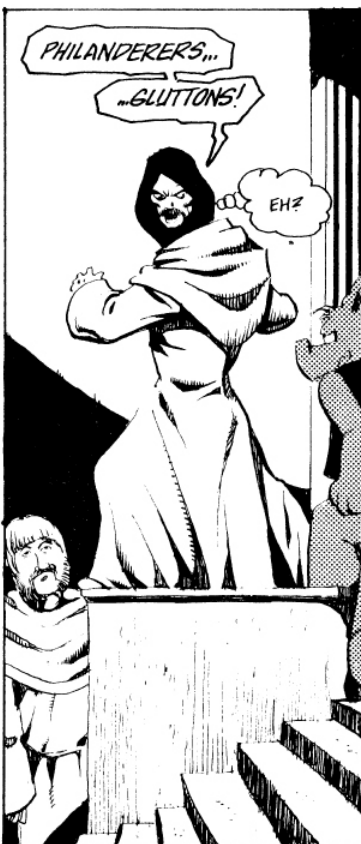
BLASPHEMERS!

YOU ARE ABOMINATIONS IN THE EYES OF THE LIVING TARINI...

REPENT...!

I LOOK ABOUT ME...

AND WHAT IS IT I SEE?



AH! THE PITS! A
FOUL PLACE! FOUL,
INDEED

BENEATH
THE CITY
THEY ARE!

"HIDDEN FOREVER FROM THE EYES OF MEN! REMNANTS OF THE
OLD CITY AND ITS OLD WAYS... IT'S A STORY THAT BEGAN WHEN
THE FIRST LORDS OF PALNU UNTAPPED MYSTERIES OF THE ANCIENT
WORLD! THERE WERE RUMOURS OF STRANGE UNHOLY EXPERIMENTS
... ALCHEMY AND OTHER FORBIDDEN DISCIPLINES..."

"FOR A TIME, THE CHURCH OF
TARIM STRUCK PALNU FROM
THEIR MAPS, AND ALLOWED
NO PRIEST TO VENTURE
WITHIN A HALF-MILE OF IT."

"AND THEN... ABOUT
A CENTURY AGO..."

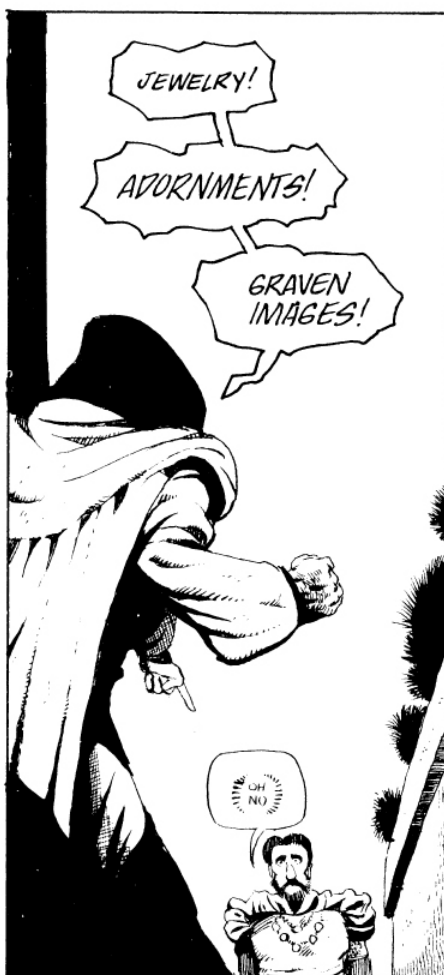
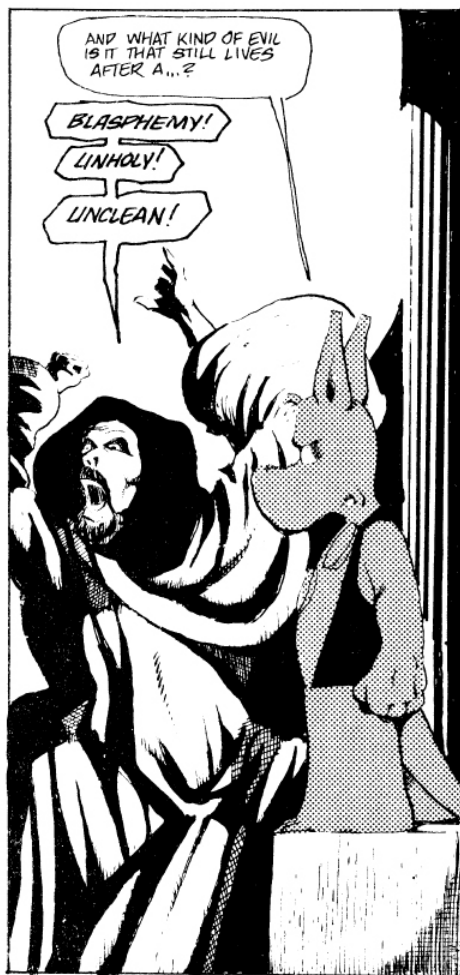
"AN EARTHQUAKE SWALLOWED UP THE CITY; A GIFT FROM THE INFINITE MERCIES OF THE LIVING TARIM...
THOUSANDS DIED, VIRTUALLY IN THE BLINKING OF AN EYE. FULLY NINETY PERCENT OF THE CITY DISAPPEARED
BENEATH THE SURFACE, EVEN TODAY, MANY OF THE OLD STREETS LIE INTACT BENEATH THE CITY..."

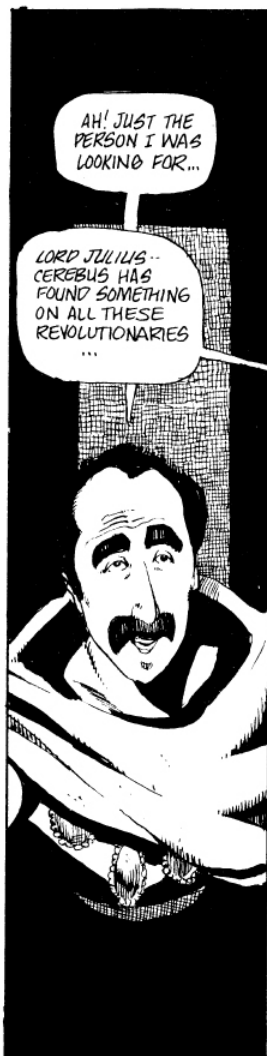
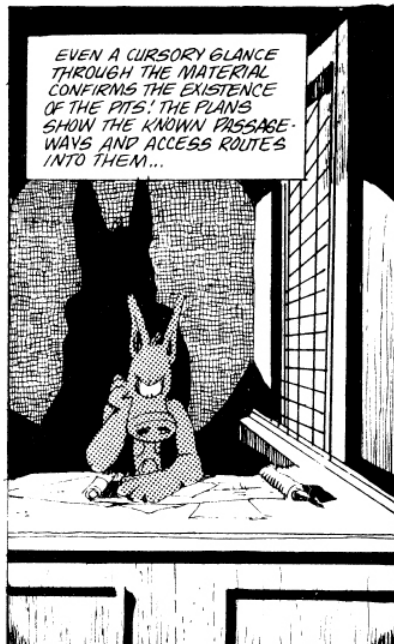
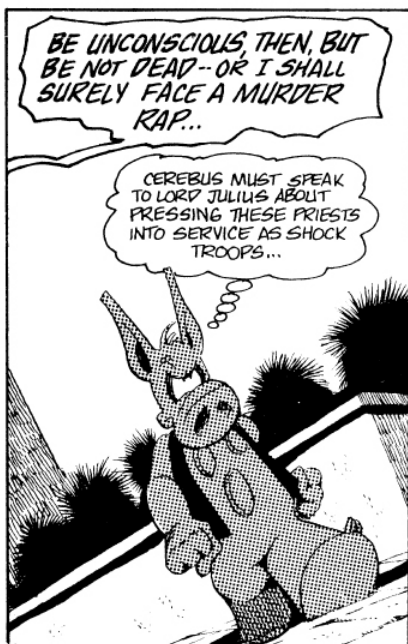
"IT IS THESE PASSAGE-WAYS
WHICH ARE CALLED..."

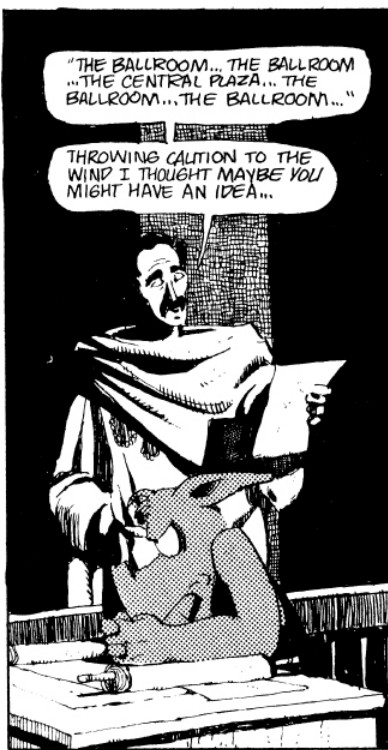
"...THE
PITS!"

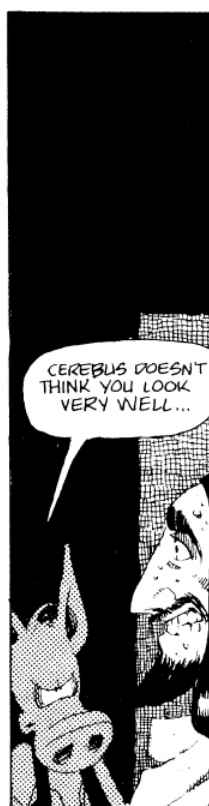
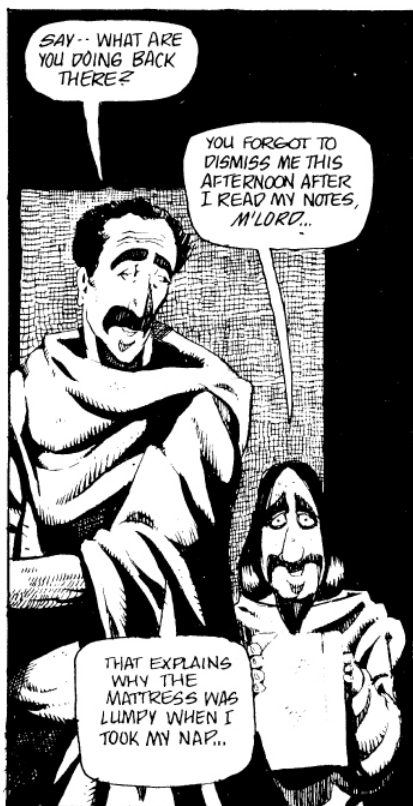
"THOUGH MOST REGARD
THEM AS AN AMUSING
BIT OF FOLKLORE, POP-
ULATED BY MYTHICAL
BEASTS, DREAMED UP
TO FRIGHTEN CHILDREN"

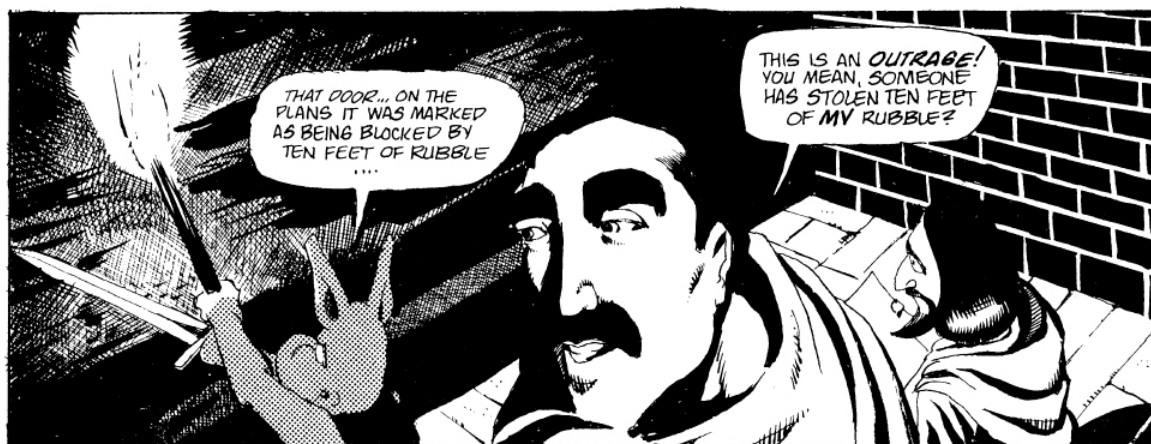
"THEY ARE UNAWARE
THAT MUCH EVIL
MANIFESTED IN THE
OLD CITY YET LIVES
IN THOSE DARK CAVERNS"













...OR...

...EATEN IT.



DON'T BE
ABSURD! THE PEASANTS
ARE HUNGRY...

...BUT THEY'RE
NOT *THAT* HUNGRY...



COME ALONG, BASKIN! IF
THAT RUBBLE THIEF IS STILL
AROUND, HE'S GOING TO RUE THE
DAY HE TANGLED WITH US!



STAY CLOSE
TOGETHER --
THIS MAY BE
A TRAP..

M-MAYHAP
WE SHOULD
TURN BACK



I DON'T LIKE TO DISILLUSION
YOU BOYS, BUT ANYONE STUPID
ENOUGH TO STEAL RUBBLE
COULDN'T BE SMART ENOUGH
TO CONSTRUCT A REALLY
SOPHISTICATED..



CLANG
CLANG



HELP?

ABRUPTLY, TORCHES FLARE TO BRILLIANT LIFE, BLINDING THE TRO...

GREETINGS...

WHEN THEIR VISION CLEARS, THEY ARE IN A LONG TUNNEL OF ROUGH STONE BLOCKS--THE SIDE WALLS ILLUMINATED BY TWO ROWS OF TORCHES...

...AS THE LEADER OF THE "EYE OF THE PYRAMID" I BID WELCOME TO THE SOON-TO-BE-DEPARTED LORD JULIUS OF PALNU AND HIS...

...COMPANIONS.

MAYHAP YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED...

BUT ONE OF YOUR RABBITS ISN'T IN HIS HUTCH...

INTENTIONAL, I ASSURE YOU ...WHEN I SAW YOU CARRYING A SWORD, I ASSUMED YOU WERE LORD JULIUS'...

...CHAMPION?

LORD JULIUS' EMPLOYEE ...

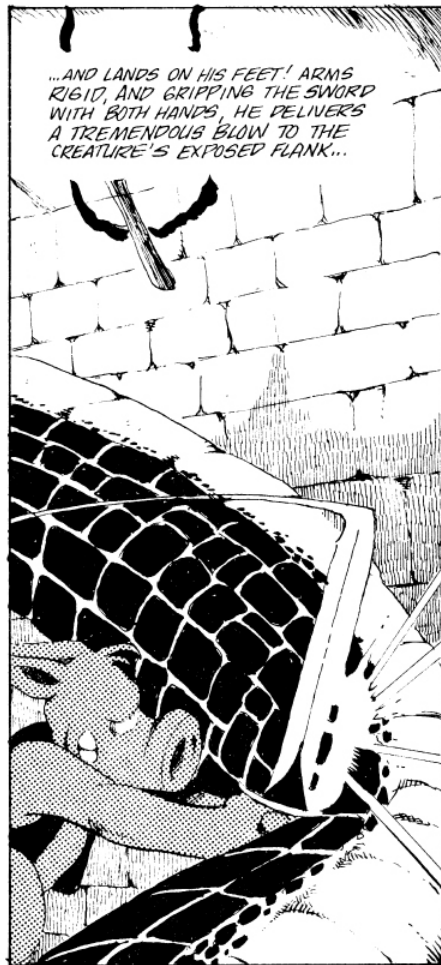
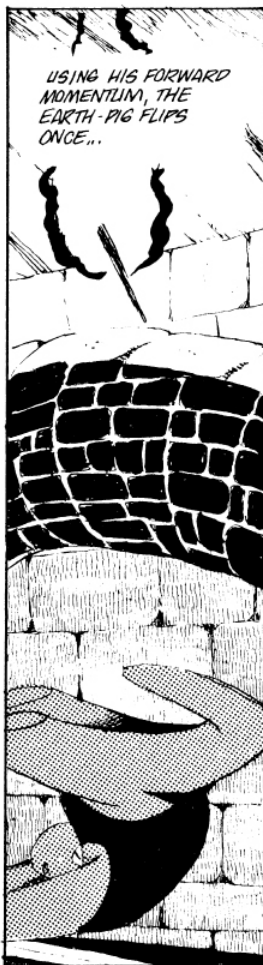
...IF YOU COME DOWN HERE IT WILL SAVE CEREBUS THE TROUBLE OF DISMANTLING THAT WALL...

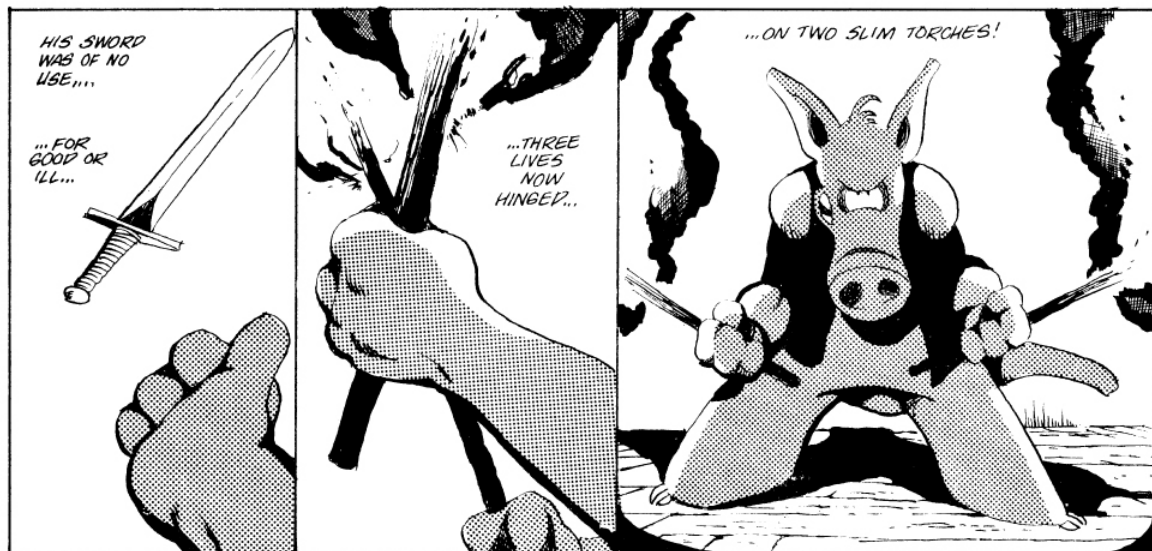
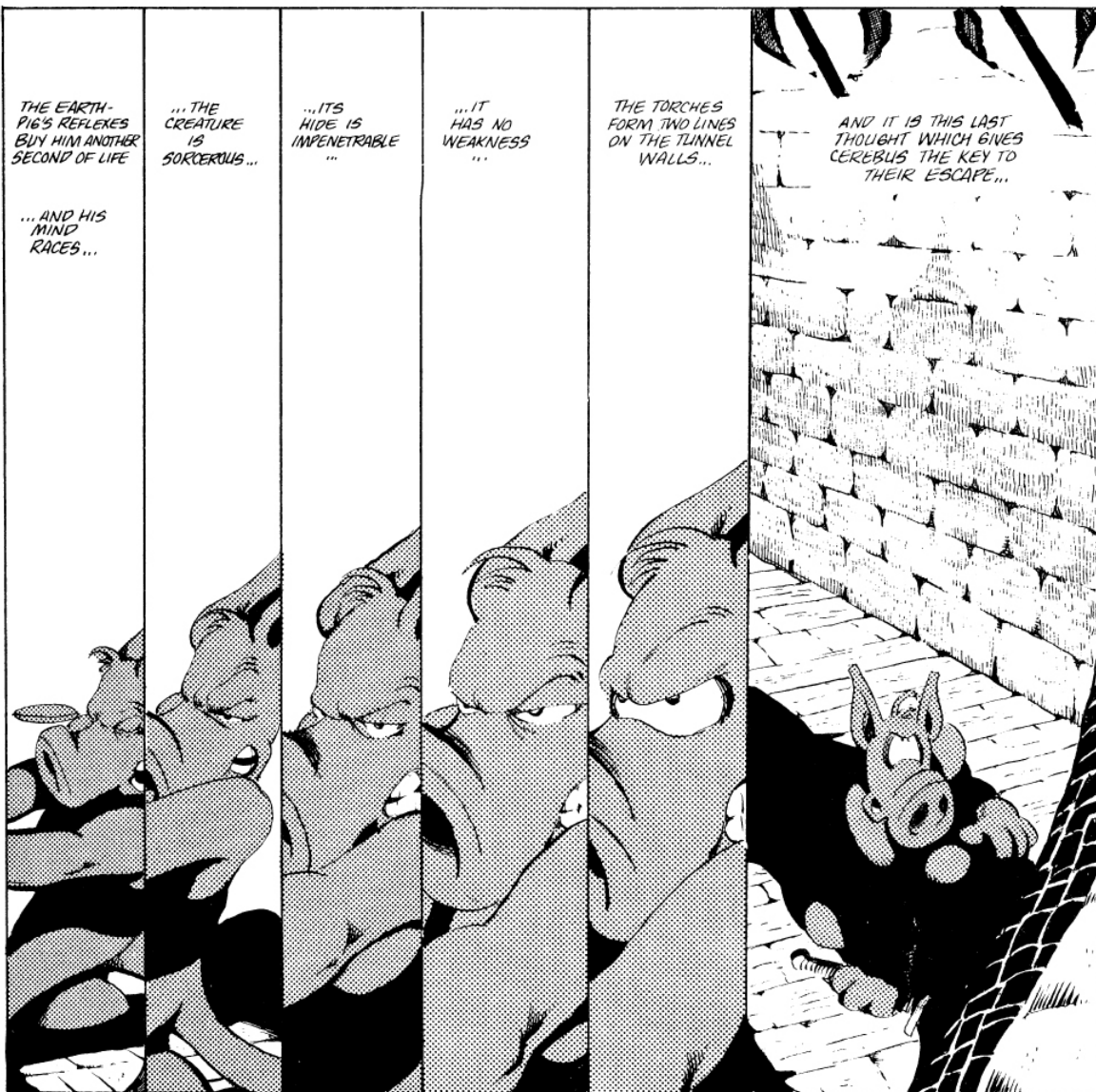
FOR A THOUSAND YEARS HAS THE PYRAMID SURVIVED...

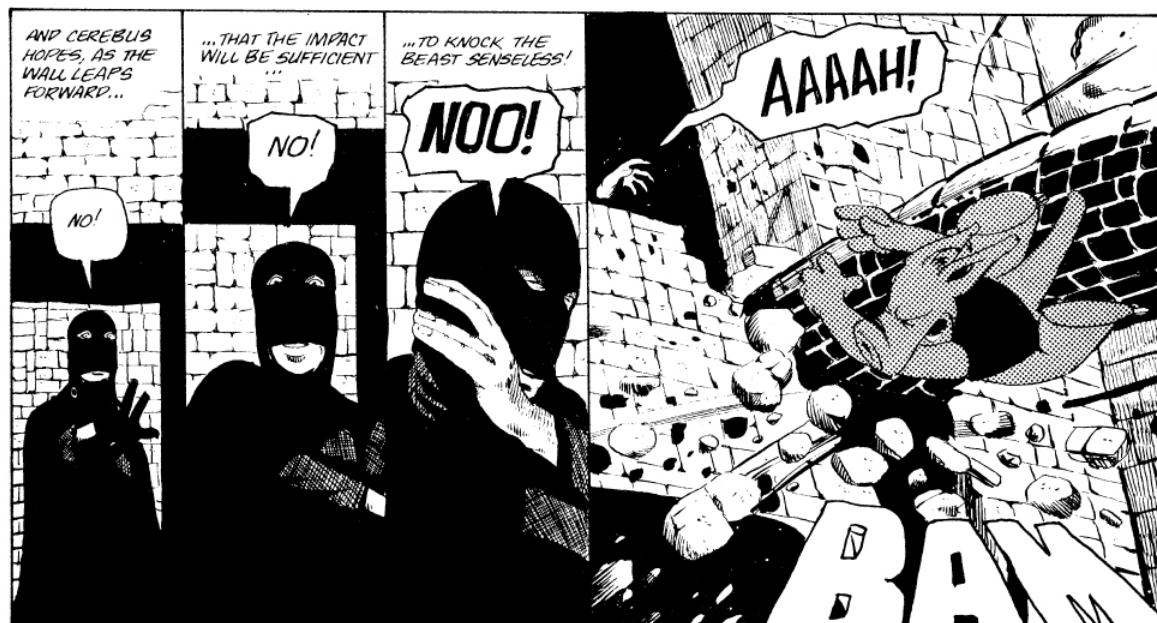
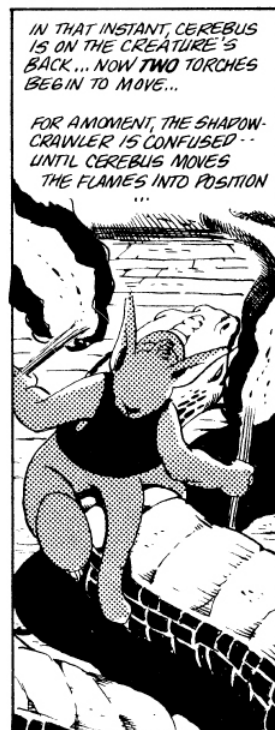
AND FOR A THOUSAND YEARS...

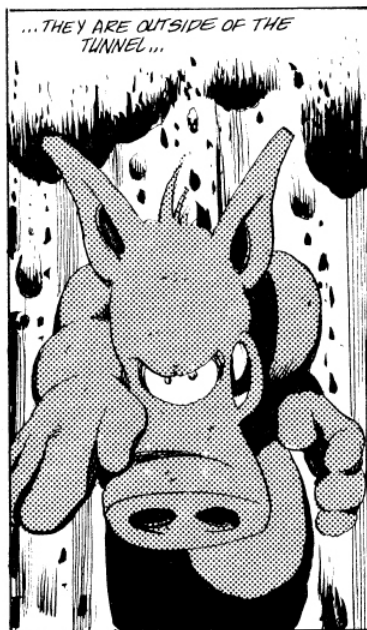
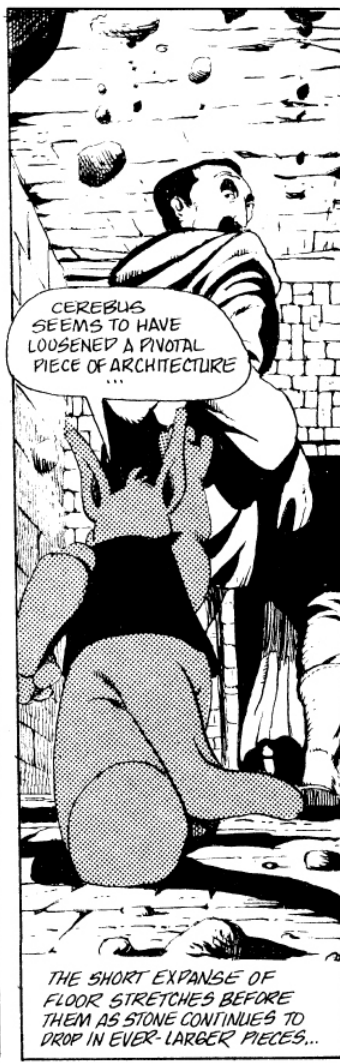
THERE HAS BEEN BUT ONE FATE FOR THE UNBELIEVER...





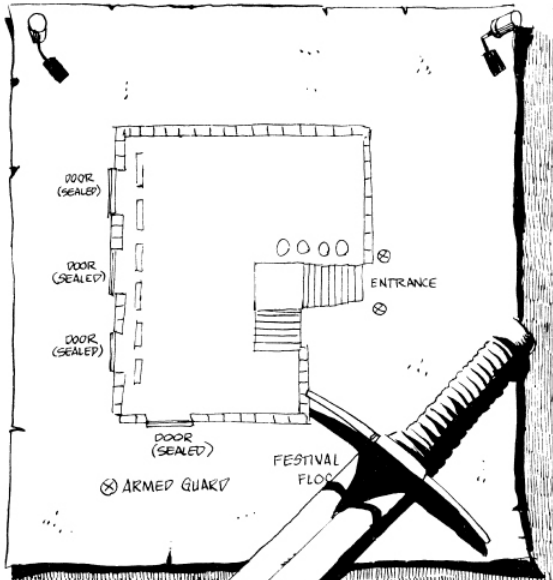






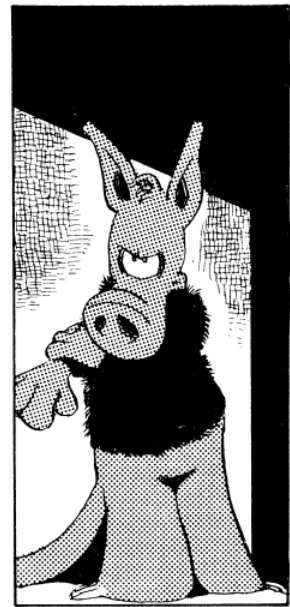


cerebus the aardvark

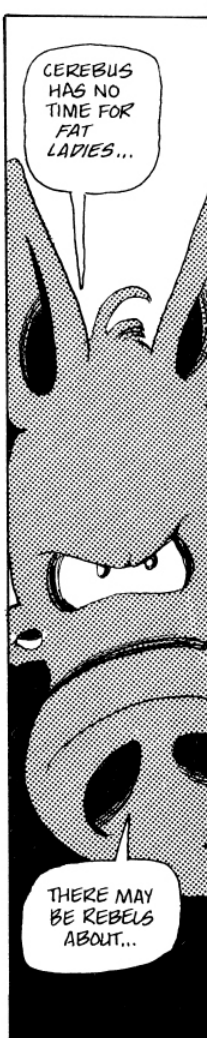
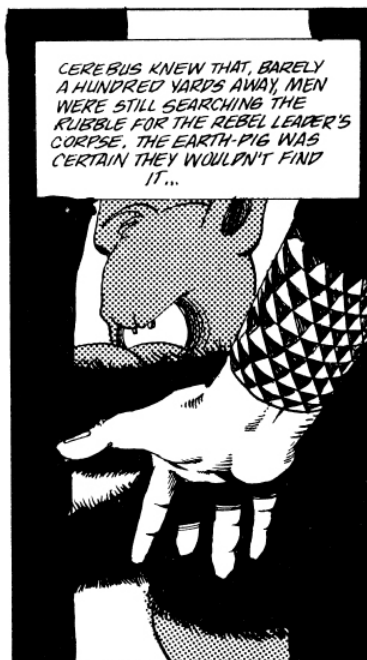
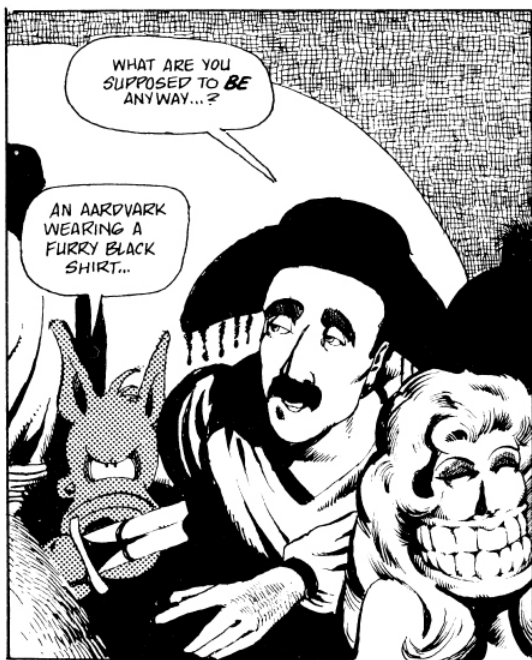


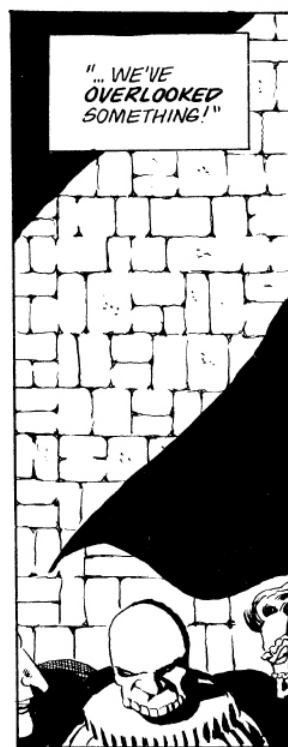
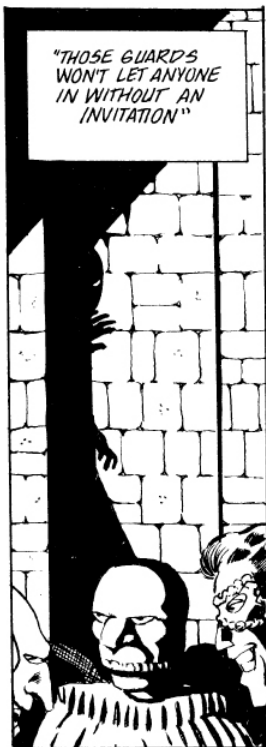
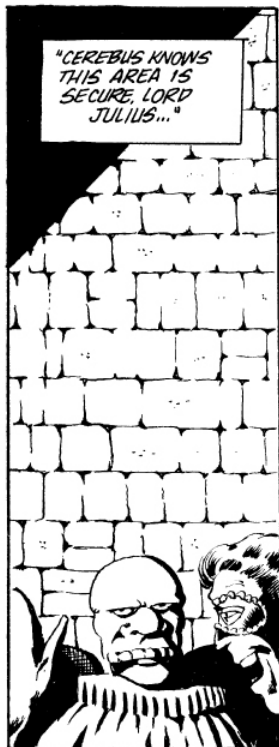
synopsis:

THE ATTACKS ON THE BUREAUCRACY BY THE REVOLUTIONARIES KNOWN ONLY AS THE EYE OF THE PYRAMID HAVE BECOME EVEN MORE FREQUENT. AS THE FESTIVAL OF PETUNIUS NEARS, CEREBUS IS FACED WITH MAKING THE PITS INTO A SAFE LOCATION FOR THE FESTIVITIES. HE INSISTS, OVER LORD JULIUS' GRUMBING THAT THE GUEST LIST AND FESTIVAL AREA BE CUT IN HALF AND ONLY ONE ENTRANCE BE LEFT UNSEALED. EVEN WITH THESE PRECAUTIONS, THERE IS NO GUARANTEE OF SAFETY. IF A POTENTIAL ASSASSIN WAS ON THE GUEST LIST, HE COULD EASILY STRIKE DOWN THE GRANDLORD OF PALNU AND ESCAPE IN THE CONFUSION. IT IS THE EARTH-PIG'S HOPE THAT JULIUS HAS HEEDED HIS WARNINGS AND WILL KEEP HIMSELF AT A REASONABLE DISTANCE FROM THE CROWD OF PARTY-GOERS...











E'LESS! IT'S HIM!
IT'S THE-KILLER-
WHO-LOOKS-LIKE-
A-BUNNY!

SH! THESE TWO
INVITATIONS
TOOK THE
LAST OF OUR
MONEY!

IF YOU GET US
THROWN OUT, WE
LOSE OUR CHANCE AT
THE WYNDMEL DIAMOND



AND WITHOUT
THAT DIAMOND WE
DON'T HAVE ANY
MONEY FOR
FOOD...

BUT E'LESS--WHAT IF
HE RECOGNIZES ME? HE
DOESN'T LIKE ME--I CAN
TELL BY THE WAY HE
PUNCHES ME WHENEVER
I GET NEAR HIM...*

* CEREBUS #6



JUST KEEP THAT
MASK ON, DON'T
TALK...

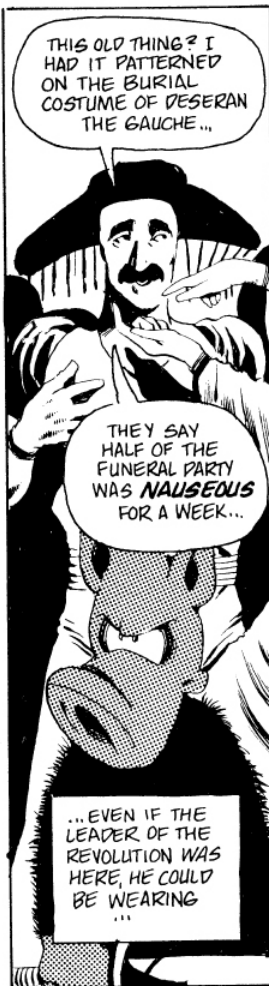
... AND
TRY NOT
TO MOVE
AROUND...

WITH ANY LUCK
HE'LL FIGURE YOU'RE
A BABY ELM THAT
SOMEONE DRESSED
UP AS A JOKE...



WHY, LORD JULIUS
-- WHAT AN ADORABLE
COSTUME...

THE SITUATION
WAS **HOPELESS**
THE EARTH-PIG
HAD DECIDED
...



THIS OLD THING? I
HAD IT PATTERNED
ON THE BURIAL
COSTUME OF DESERAN
THE GAUCHE...

THEY SAY
HALF OF THE
FUNERAL PARTY
WAS **NAUSEOUS**
FOR A WEEK...

...EVEN IF THE
LEADER OF THE
REVOLUTION WAS
HERE, HE COULD
BE WEARING
...



TEE-HEE! YOU
SAY THE **CUTEST**
THINGS...

DON'T I
THOUGH?

UNH?



IT'S
HIM!

HE'S EVEN
WEARING
THE SAME
ROBES!

CEREBUS PAUSED.

PERHAPS IT WAS
A TRICK...

...A DECOY IN BLACK
ROBES TO DRAW
HIM AWAY FROM
LORD JULIUS...

THE EARTH-PIG
SUDDENLY FELT VULNERABLE
...THEY WERE IN THE MIDST
OF THE CROWD FAR FROM
THE STONE WALLS AND
STAIRWAY...

TACTICALLY, THEIR
POSITION WAS A
DISASTER...

A MOTION TO THE RIGHT
CATCHES CEREBUS'
ATTENTION...

GRADUALLY HE BECOMES AWARE
THAT THERE ARE ABOUT A DOZEN
AMONG THE GUESTS WATCHING
HIM INTENTLY...

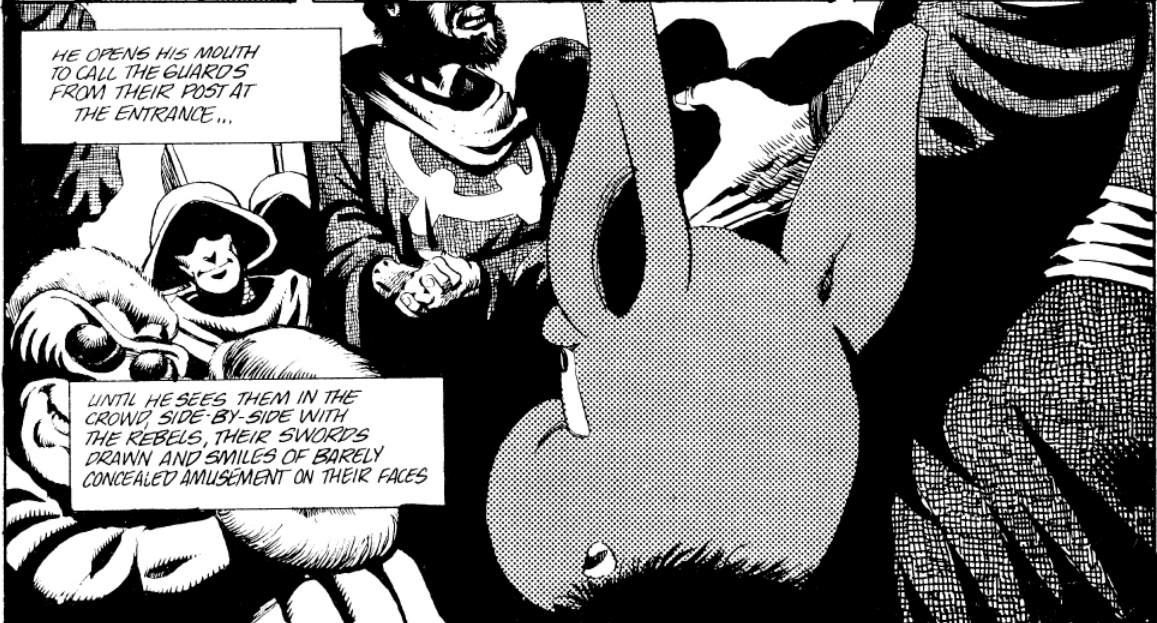
EACH IS CARRYING A
SWORD, AND STEP
BY-CAUTIOUS-STEP,
...

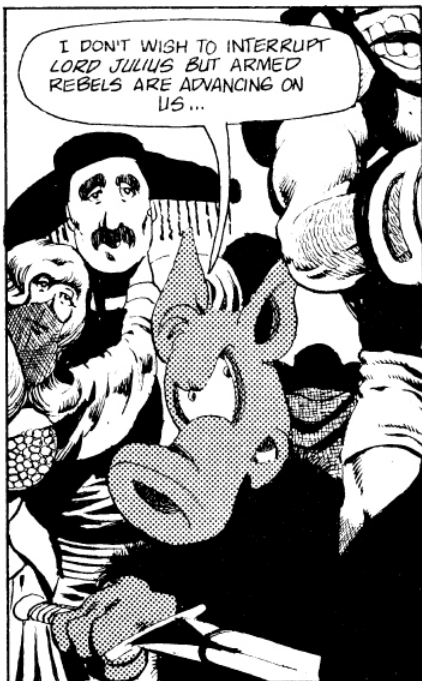
...EACH IS GETTING
CLOSER AND CLOSER
TO HIM...



HE OPENS HIS MOUTH
TO CALL THE GUARD'S
FROM THEIR POST AT
THE ENTRANCE...

UNTIL HE SEES THEM IN THE
CROWD, SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH
THE REBELS, THEIR SWORDS
DRAWN AND SMILES OF BARELY
CONCEALED AMUSEMENT ON THEIR FACES





I DON'T WISH TO INTERRUPT LORD JULIUS BUT ARMED REBELS ARE ADVANCING ON US...

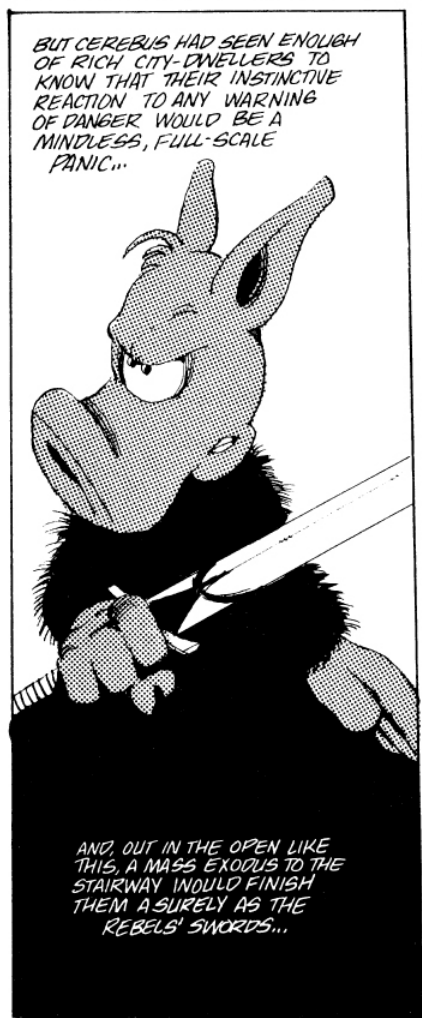


WELL, DON'T JUST **STAND** THERE-- **DO** SOMETHING...

CEREBUS IS OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS



HIS SWORD WOULD BE USELESS AGAINST A DOZEN OPPONENTS! HIS ONLY CHANCE WOULD BE TO GET THE FESTIVAL GUESTS TO TURN ON THE ARMED REVOLUTIONARIES SOMEHOW...



BUT CEREBUS HAD SEEN ENOUGH OF RICH CITY-DWELLERS TO KNOW THAT THEIR INSTINCTIVE REACTION TO ANY WARNING OF DANGER WOULD BE A MINDLESS, FULL-SCALE PANIC...

AND, OUT IN THE OPEN LIKE THIS, A MASS EXODUS TO THE STAIRWAY WOULD FINISH THEM A SURELY AS THE REBELS' SWORDS...



EVEN IF HE COULD ROUSE A FEW OF THE JADED MERCHANTS TO AID HIM, THE MATERIAL IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE WAS NOT EXACTLY INSPIRING...



HEMME IN NEXT TO THE REFRESHMENT TABLES, CEREBUS BEGINS TO THINK THAT THE LAST SOUND HE WOULD EVER HEAR WOULD BE THE GRINDING OF MOLARS...

TARIM! IT WOULD TAKE A CROWBAR TO PRY THEIR FEEBLE MINDS AWAY FROM THAT FOUL-SMELLING...



A MOMENT LATER A SLOW GRIN SPREAD ACROSS THE EARTH-PIG'S FEATURES

AND HE PLACED THE SWORD BETWEEN HIS FEET...



ATTENTION, EVERYONE! LORD JULIUS HAS ARRANGED A LITTLE DIVERSION FOR ALL OF US!

I HAVE?

A GAME!
A GAME!

OBOY!
A GAME!

I LOVE GAMES!



HE HAS ENGAGED SOME PROFESSIONAL ENTERTAINERS TO JOIN THE FESTIVAL ...THEY'RE THE ONES CARRYING THE SWORDS ...

SAY... WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?



THE OBJECT OF THE GAME IS SIMPLE --

YOU HAVE TO COVER THE ENTERTAINERS FROM HEAD TO FOOT WITH HERRING-AND-ONION DIP!



THE FIRST COUPLE WITH AN EMPTY BOWL WILL BE DECARED KING AND QUEEN OF PETUNIAS...

THE CLOSEST REBEL MUTTERS AN OATH AND RESUMES HIS STEALTHY ADVANCE ...



RECENTLY ARRIVED IN PALNU, HE, QUITE NATURALLY, IS UNAWARE OF JUST HOW LITTLE IT TAKES TO AMUSE THE CREAM OF PALNU'S MERCHANT CLASS



IN SECONDS, THE REBELS ARE THROWN INTO CONFUSION AS THE AIR FILLS WITH BLOBS OF THE FOUL-SMELLING MIXTURE AND BEGINS TO COAT THEIR SKIN AND THEIR CLOTHING...

KEEP THROWING, SWEETHEART - ONLY HALF A BOWL TO GO...

I GOT ONE!

SPLAT

PLOOP!

PLAP

ZIPPPP

IT'S ONE OF LORD JULIUS' TRICKS...

GUARD THE EXIT, BROTHER JANUS!

GUARD THE EXIT?

YOU MORON--

I CAN'T EVEN SEE THE EXIT!

SLOPP

WHILE, ACROSS THE ROOM, LADY WYNMEL-SMITH IS STILL RECOVERING FROM HER MEETING WITH A PREOCCUPIED EARTH-PIG...

THE IMMIGRATION LAWS SIMPLY MUST BE TIGHTENED, LUCIUS...

YES, MY DEAR...

...PERHAPS YOU'D BE BETTER TO JUST PUT IT OUT OF YOUR MIND...

MARK MY WORDS! IF SOMETHING ISN'T DONE SOON, WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE HIP-DEEP IN SHORT, ILL-MANNERED FOREIGNERS!

YES, MY DEAR...

WILL YOU BE ALL RIGHT WHILE I GET YOU SOME BRANDY?

KITCHEN STAFF SUPERVISOR! THE IDEA! WHAT MUST LORD JULIUS HAVE BEEN THINKING OF?!



PERHAPS I
COULD GET YOU
SOME OF THAT
DIP WE HAD
EARLIER...?



LUCIUS! THE
DIP! NOW I
KNOW WHAT THE
WRETCHED CREATURE
HAS PLANNED-HE'S
GOING TO POISON
US ALL!



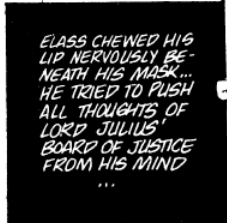
HE
PROBABLY
STIRKED IT
WITH THOSE LICE-
INFESTED HANDS
OF HIS... AND
... I... I...
... ATE ...



OOOOOOOOH



PERHAPS
JUST THE
BRANDY,
THEN...
DON'T GO
AWAY, MY
DEAR...



ELASS CHEWED HIS
LIP NERVOUSLY BE-
NEATH HIS MASK...
HE TRIED TO PUSH
ALL THOUGHTS OF
LORD JULIUS'
BOARD OF JUSTICE
FROM HIS MIND



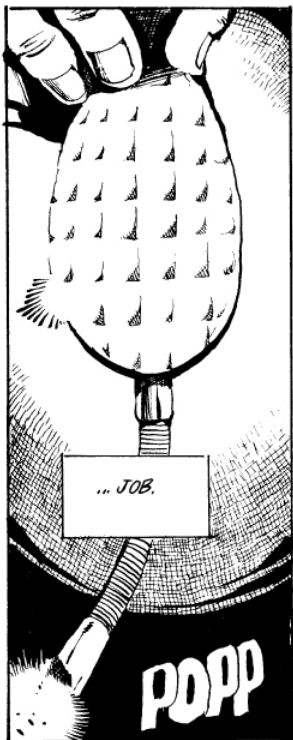
THE INFREQUENT IN-
CIDENTS OF CRIME IN
PALNU WAS DUE IN LARGE
PART TO THIS AUGUST BODY
RENOUNDED FOR THEIR
WISDOM, EXPERIENCE...

...AND UNBLEMISHED RECORD OF
THREE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED
AND EIGHTY-ONE CONVICTIONS IN
THREE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED
AND EIGHTY-ONE TRIALS...



GINGERLY LIFTING THE DIAMOND WITH ONE
HAND, HIS RESOLVE CRUMBLES! WHAT IF
SOMEONE WAS WATCHING HIM? HE HADN'T
PLANNED THOROUGHLY ENOUGH--BETTER
TO GET OUT NOW! IF THEY NEEDED MONEY, TURK
WOULD JUST HAVE TO GET A...

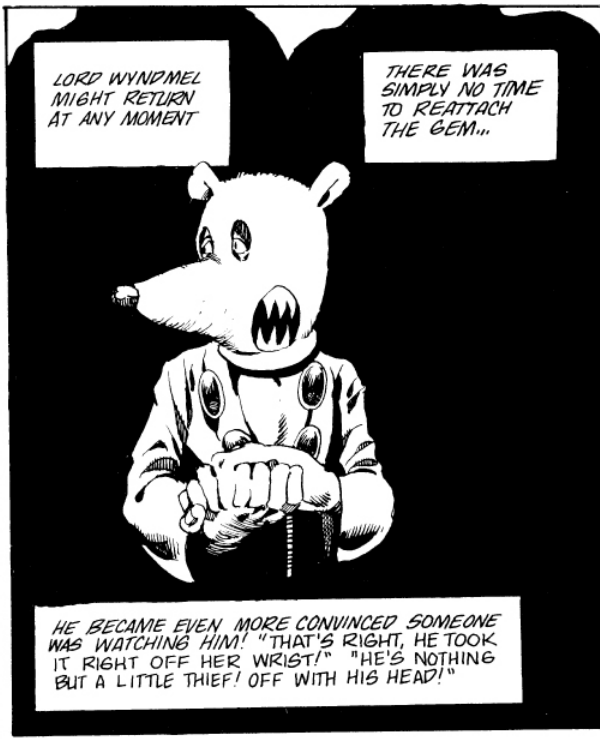




... JOB.



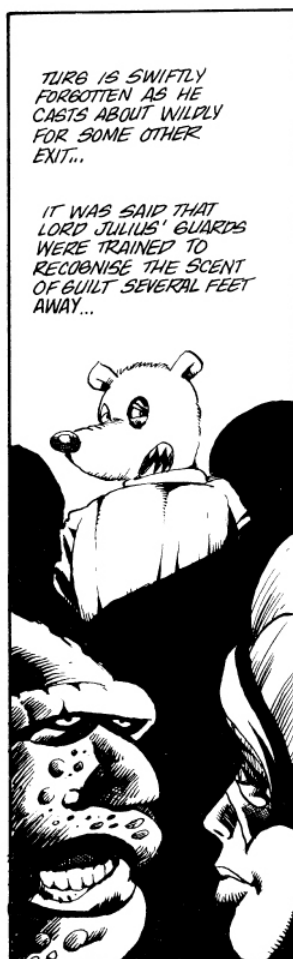
THE BUTTERFLIES
IN HIS STOMACH
BECAME FANGED
LIZARDS... HE
HAD SEEN
LORD JULIUS'
GUARDS AT THE
ENTRANCE...



LORD WYNDMEL
MIGHT RETURN
AT ANY MOMENT

THERE WAS
SIMPLY NO TIME
TO REATTACH
THE GEM...

HE BECAME EVEN MORE CONVINCED SOMEONE
WAS WATCHING HIM! "THAT'S RIGHT, HE TOOK
IT RIGHT OFF HER WRIST!" "HE'S NOTHING
BUT A LITTLE THIEF! OFF WITH HIS HEAD!"



TURG IS SWIFTLY
FORGOTTEN AS HE
CASTS ABOUT WILDLY
FOR SOME OTHER
EXIT...

IT WAS SAID THAT
LORD JULIUS' GUARDS
WERE TRAINED TO
RECOGNISE THE SCENT
OF BUILT SEVERAL FEET
AWAY...



CEREBUS SCANNED THE CROWD
THROUGH A HERRING AND ONION
BLUR... WITH THE FAILURE OF
HIS ASSASSINS, THE REBEL LEADER
WAS DOUBTLESS EVEN NOW
CRAWLING BACK UNDER SOME
CONVENIENT ROCK...



LORD
JULIUS! OVER
THERE!

EH?
OVER...

OHO!

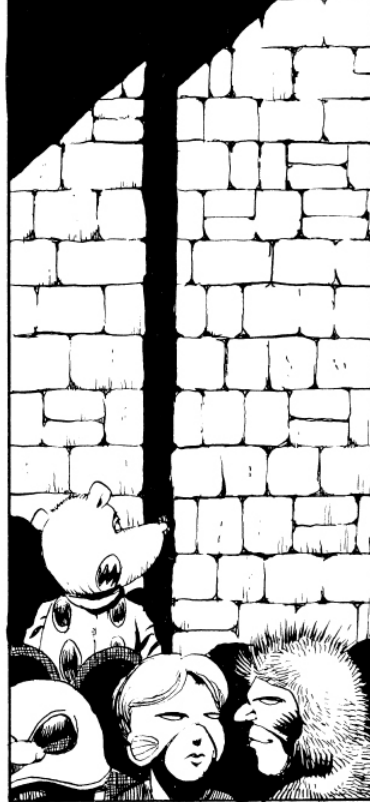
A FEELING BEGINS TO
GNAW AT E'LESS' NERVES
THAT THERE **WAS** ONLY
ONE EXIT...



LADY WYNDMEL WAS
ALREADY STIRRING ON
HER COUCH! E'LESS
WHIMPERED... THERE
JUST **HAD** TO BE...

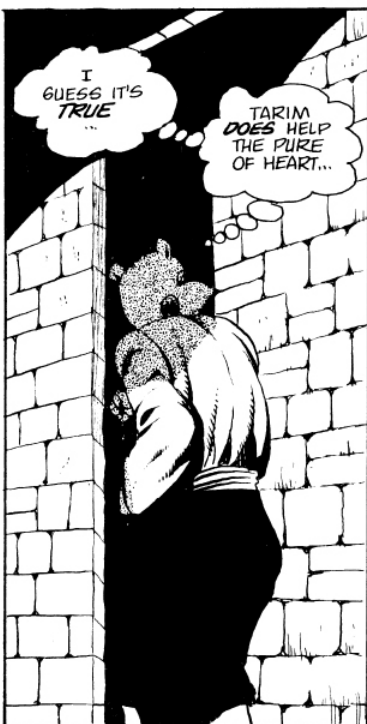


...A WAY
OUT...



I
GUESS IT'S
TRUE...

TARIM
DOES HELP
THE PURE
OF HEART...



LOCKED IN CONVERSATION,
CEREBUS AND LORD JULIUS
FAIL TO SEE THE **SECOND**
FIGURE SLIP QUIETLY AWAY
FROM THE FESTIVITIES...

WELL?

AREN'T
YOU GOING
AFTER HIM?

CEREBUS THINKS
YOU BETTER COME
ALONG, TOO

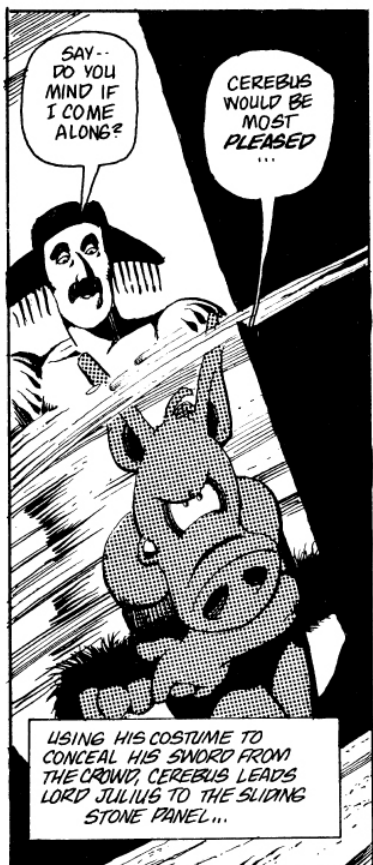


ME? WHY?

BECAUSE THOSE
ASSASSINS ARE GOING
TO BE A TRIFLE PEEVISH
WHEN THE CROWD RUNS
OUT OF DIP...

AND THEY'VE
ALREADY BEEN
ORDERED TO
KILL YOU...





SAY--
DO YOU
MIND IF
I COME
ALONG?

CEREBUS
WOULD BE
MOST
PLEASED
...

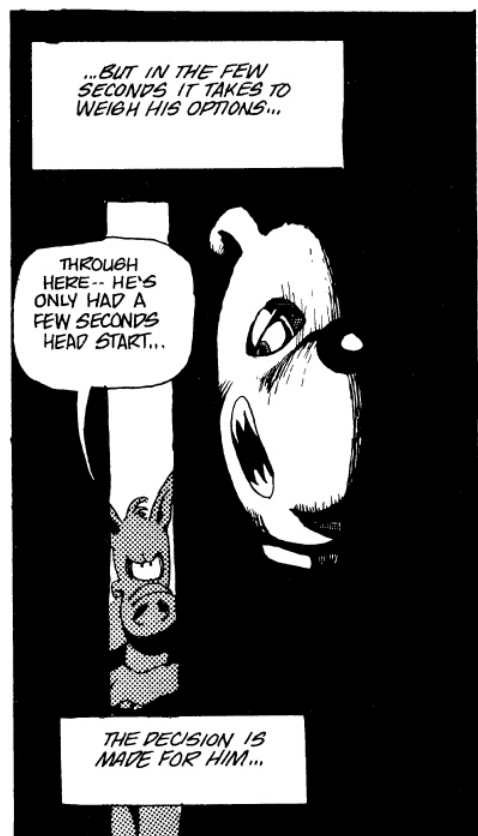
USING HIS COSTUME TO
CONCEAL HIS SWORD FROM
THE CROWD, CEREBUS LEADS
LORD JULIUS TO THE SLIDING
STONE PANEL...



E'LASS CONFRONTS THE
STONE CORRIDOR BEFORE
HIM WITH APPREHENSION...
BARELY A DOZEN FEET
AWAY IS INKY BLACKNESS



HIS MIND MULLS OVER THE
POSSIBILITY OF RETURNING TO
THE FESTIVAL AND DROPPING
THE DIAMOND ON THE FLOOR
--THEN PRAYING NO ONE
SEES HIM DO IT...



...BUT IN THE FEW
SECONDS IT TAKES TO
WEIGH HIS OPTIONS...

THROUGH
HERE-- HE'S
ONLY HAD A
FEW SECONDS
HEAD START...

THE DECISION IS
MADE FOR HIM...



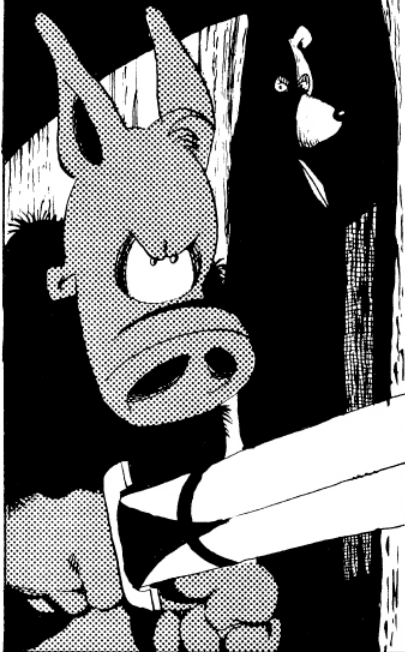
WHY NOT JUST LET
HIM GO? WE CAN BRING
A DOZEN MEN IN HERE
TOMORROW TO DESTROY
ANYTHING THAT MOVES...

HE'S MADE A
FOOL OF CEREBUS
FOR THE LAST TIME...
CEREBUS IS GOING
TO FOLLOW HIM...

...AND ONE OF
ISN'T COMING
OUT OF HERE
ALIVE...

OH, MIGHTY
TARIM--YOUR HUMBLE
SERVANT BESEECHES YOU
TO BE MERCIFUL AND STRIKE
DOWN HIS ENEMIES WITH
MASSIVE CORONARIES
...

SO TURG HAD BEEN RIGHT...
IT HAD TAKEN MORE THAN
A YEAR, BUT IT SEEMED
CEREBUS WAS JUST AS
ANGRY AS HE...



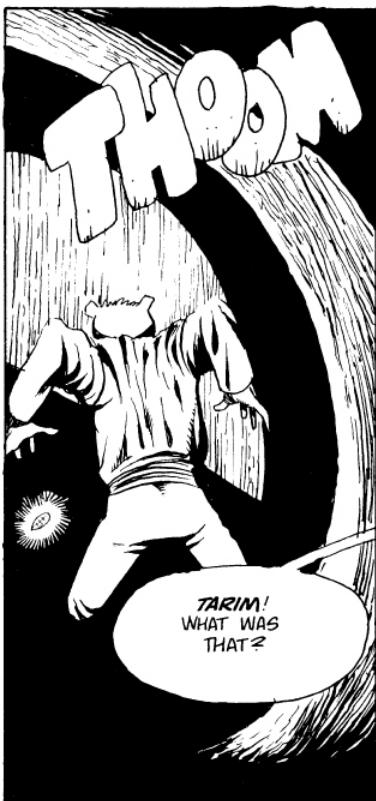
E'LESS COULD BARELY
CONTAIN HIS AMAZEMENT!
THEY HAD GONE RIGHT
PAST HIM, AS IF IT HAD
NEVER OCCURRED TO
THEM THAT HE MIGHT
BE HIDING...



E'LESS FELT HIS HEART
SWELL WITH PURITY... IN
A FEW SECONDS, THEY
WOULD BE GONE... LOOKING
FOR HIM!



WITH HIS NEWLY-
DEVELOPED BOND
WITH TARIM, E'LESS
WAS CONVINCED
HE COULD WALK
PAST JULIUS'
GUARDS WITHOUT
A...



TARIM!
WHAT WAS
THAT?

THE
SLIDING
PANEL...

AYE!

CLOSED
TIGHT...



UNDOUBTEDLY,
A SIGN THAT OUR
QUARRY SEEKS A
CONFRONTATION AS
MUCH AS CEREBUS
DOES...

NO! NO! I DON'T!
REALLY... WE COULD
BE FRIENDS! I'LL
EVEN GIVE BACK
THE DIAMOND...





AS THE SOUND OF FOOT-
STEPS FADES TO A
DISTANT ECHO, ELASS
STEALS ONCE MORE FROM
HIS HIDING PLACE...

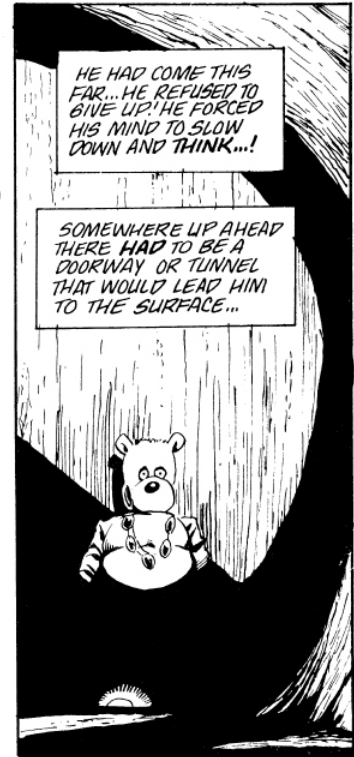


PLEASE,
TARIM!

YOU DID
IT ONCE--JUST
OPEN THE
PANEL...

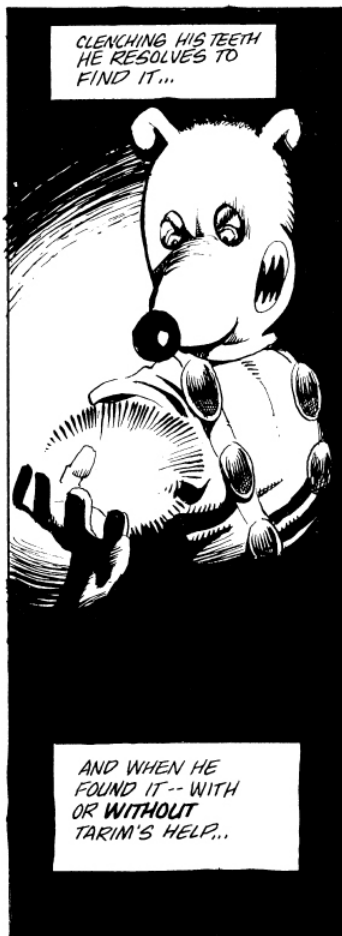
I'LL USE THE
DIAMOND TO
BUILD CHURCHES
-- MONASTERIES

PLEASE
OPEN IT
PLEEEASE!



HE HAD COME THIS
FAR... HE REFUSED TO
GIVE UP! HE FORCED
HIS MIND TO SLOW
DOWN AND THINK...!

SOMEWHERE UP AHEAD
THERE HAD TO BE A
DOORWAY OR TUNNEL
THAT WOULD LEAD HIM
TO THE SURFACE...

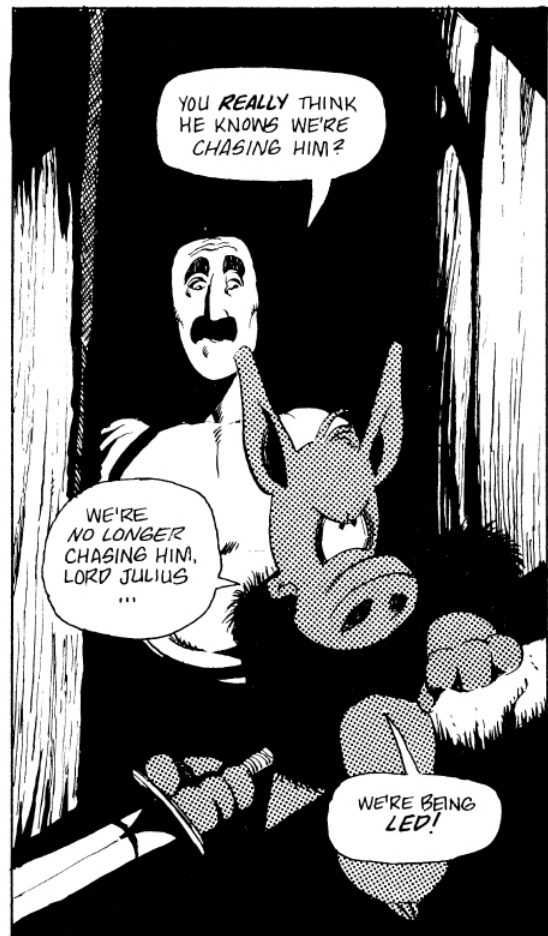


CLENCHING HIS TEETH
HE RESOLVES TO
FIND IT...

AND WHEN HE
FOUND IT-- WITH
OR WITHOUT
TARIM'S HELP...



HE WOULD BE
A VERY WEALTHY
MAN...



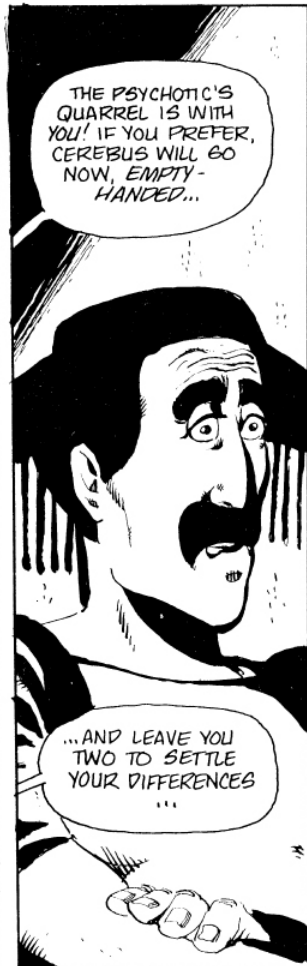
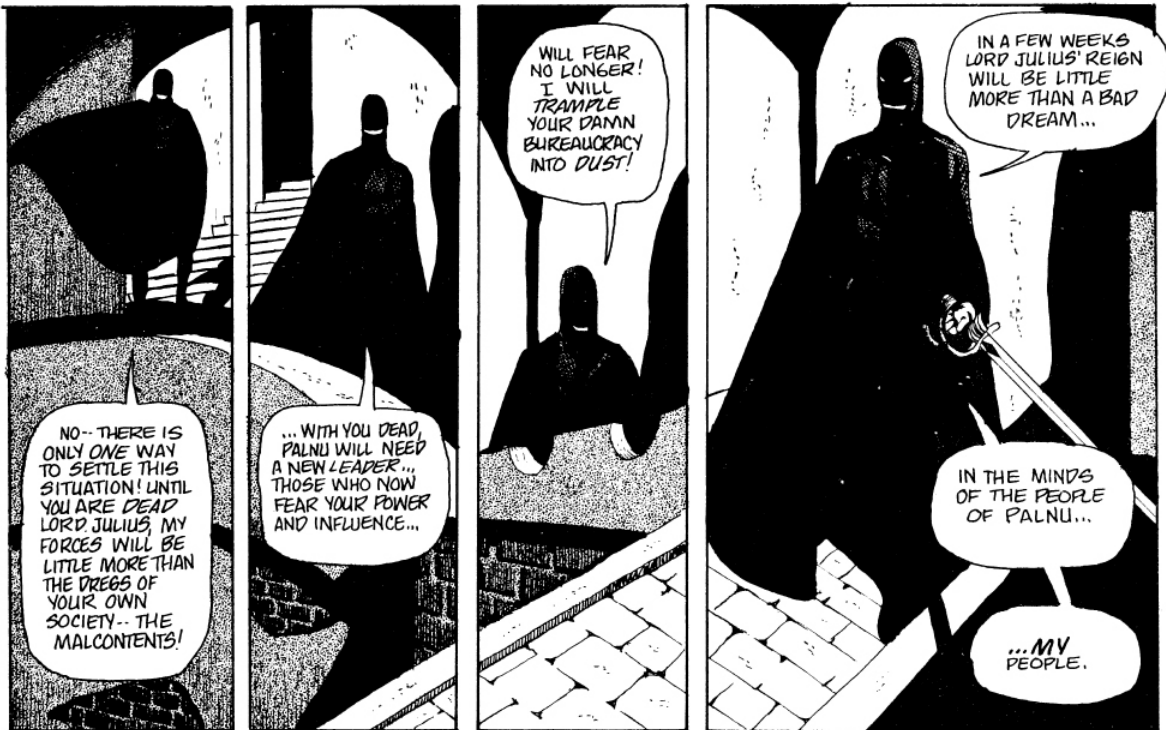
YOU REALLY THINK
HE KNOWS WE'RE
CHASING HIM?

WE'RE
NO LONGER
CHASING HIM,
LORD JULIUS
...

WE'RE BEING
LED!



* CEREBUS #15





IT'S A GOOD THING FOR YOU I'M AS BIG A COWARD AS I AM

BUT CEREBUS HAS ALREADY MOVED ONTO THE NARROW TILTED BRIDGE...



BUT, BEFORE YOU DIE, LORD JULIUS, IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW WHO WILL SUCCEED YOU!

GAZE THEN UPON THE VISAGE OF ...



...YOUR SOCIAL SECRETARY!

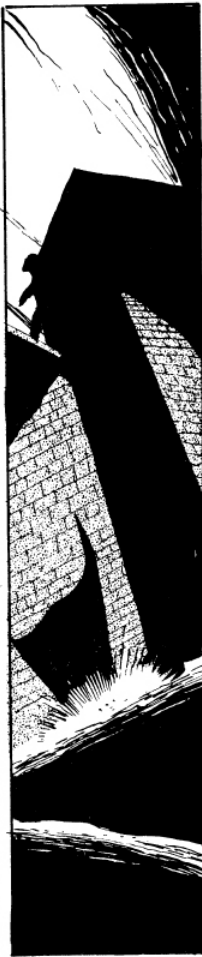


HAHAHA! YES, LORD JULIUS -- ALL ALONG YOUR GREATEST ENEMY WAS RIGHT UNDER YOUR VERY NOSE!

HOW EASY IT WAS TO CONFOUND YOUR FEEBLE PLANS! HOW YOU MUST HAVE WONDERED AT THIS ENEMY WHO SEEMED TO READ YOUR EVERY...

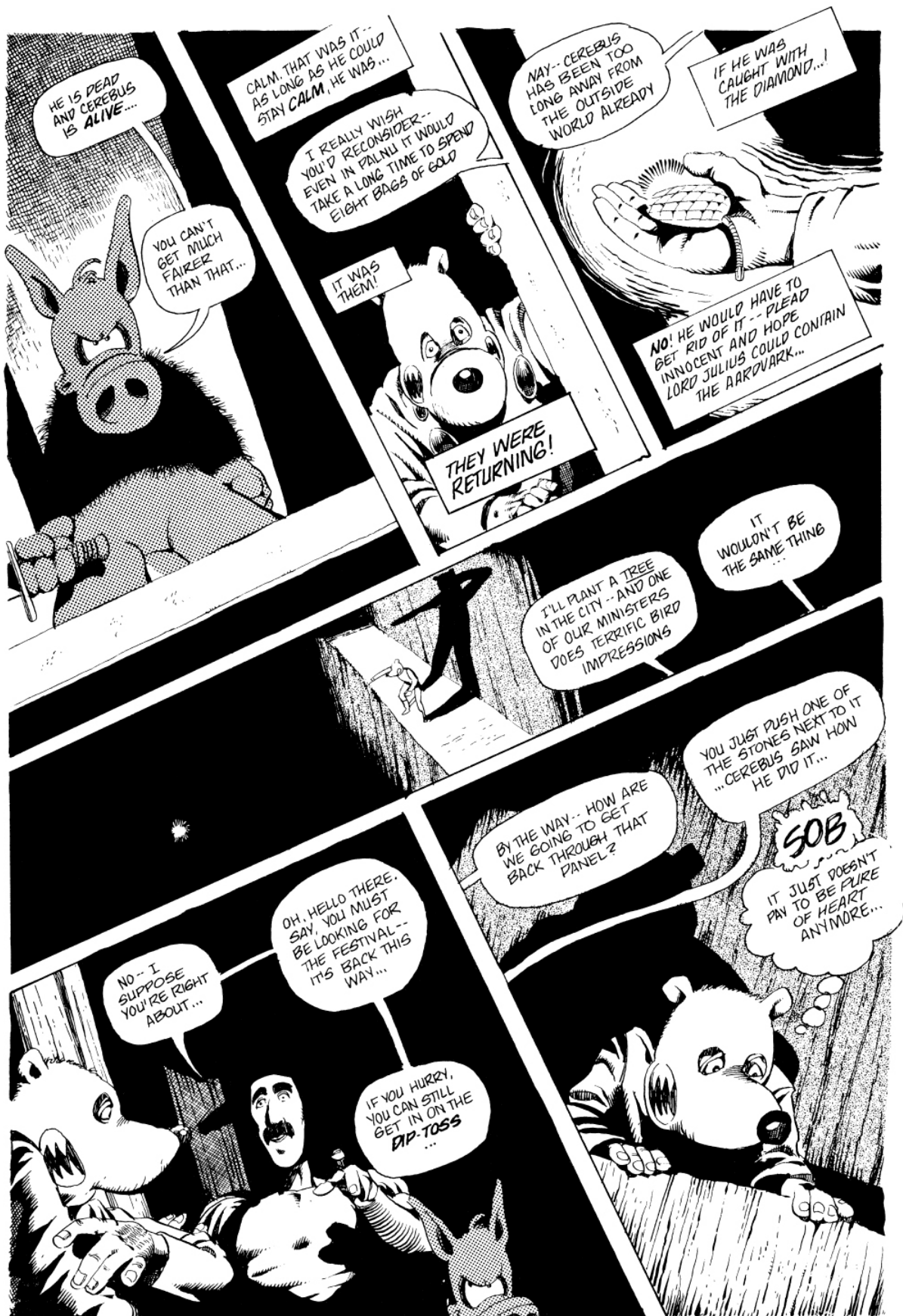


...THOUGHT...

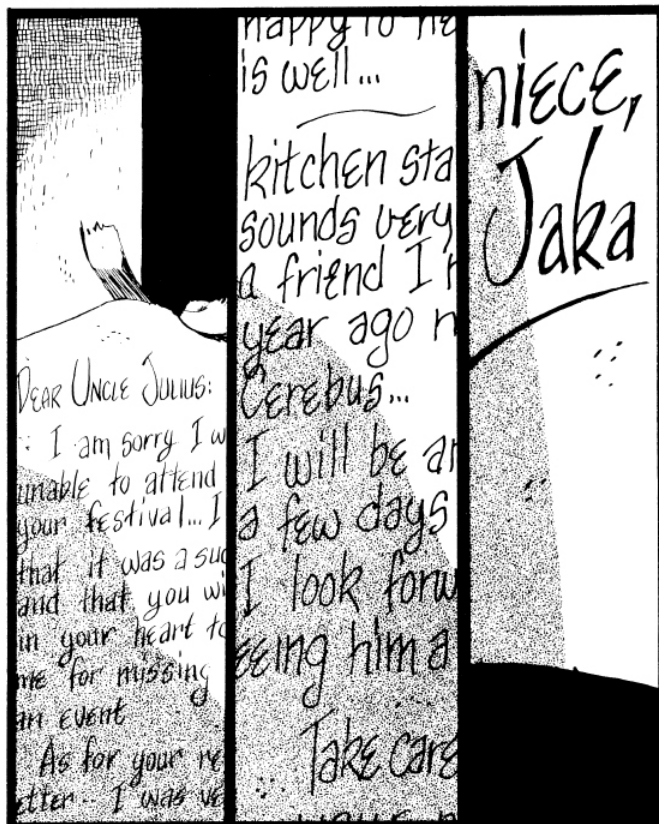


THAT WASN'T EXACTLY FAIR, WAS IT? I MEAN...

...HE THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO FIGHT TO THE DEATH WITH SWORDS!



EPILOGUE





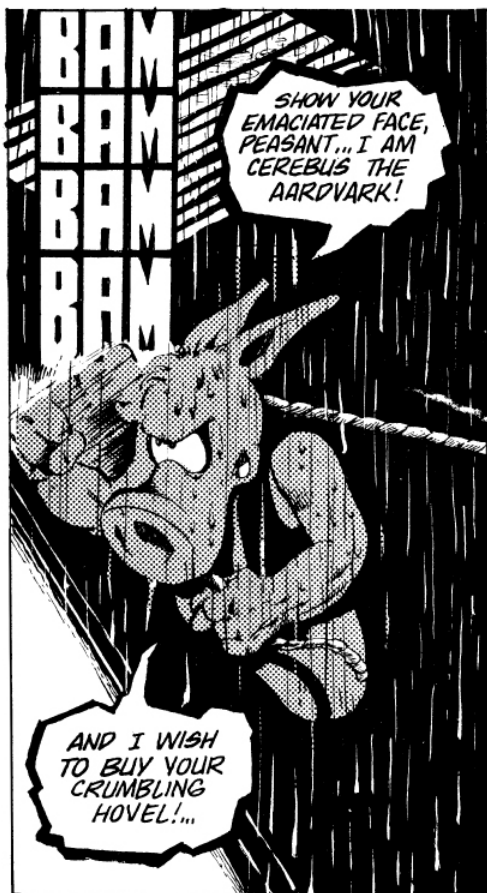
AYE, LORD JULIUS -- LIKE ALL CITY-BRED DICTATORS, YOU COULD TRUST HIM ABOUT AS FAR AS YOU COULD THROW HIM

PROBABLY, HE KEPT LAME HORSES AROUND TO FOIST OFF ON UNSUSPECTING EMPLOYEES...

CEREBUS KNEW THAT HIS ACCUSATIONS WERE LARGELY SPECULATIVE (SEEING AS HOW HE HAD INVENTED THEM OVER THE PREVIOUS TWO MILES)...

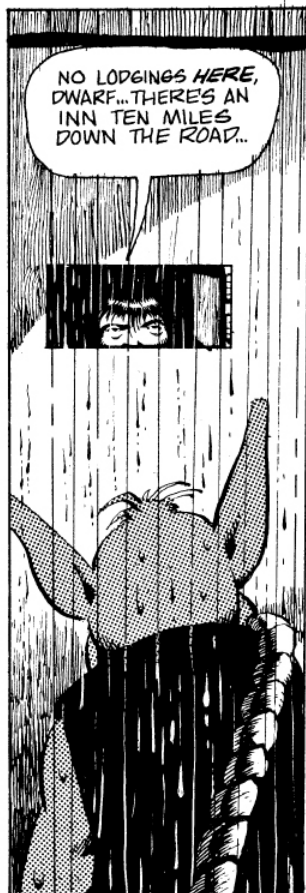
BUT HE FELT SOMEWHAT JUSTIFIED BY THE FACT THAT HE WAS SOAKED TO THE SKIN, THAT HE SMELLED LIKE THE BACK END OF A HORSE WITH DYSENTERY AND HIS ARM ACHED FROM DRAGGING EIGHT DAMN BAGS OF GOLD TARIM-ONLY. KNEW HOW MANY MILES IN THE WORST THUNDERSTORM IN RECENT MEMORY...

THE EARTH-PIG ALWAYS FOUND BLAMING AN INNOCENT SCAPEGOAT MORE SATISFYING THAN RANDOM CURSING...

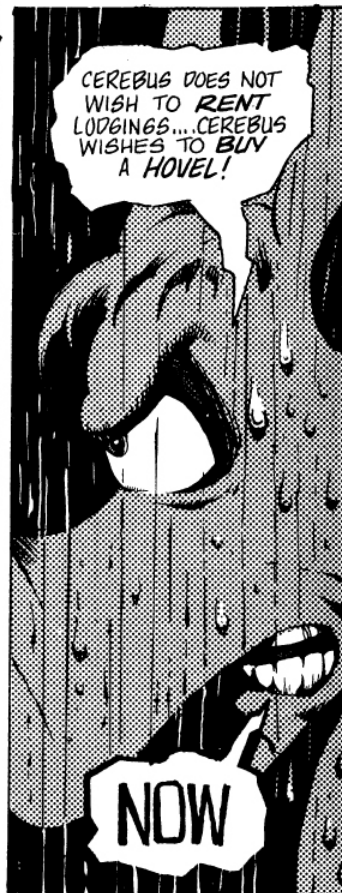


SHOW YOUR EMACIATED FACE, PEASANT... I AM CEREBUS THE AARDVARK!

AND I WISH TO BUY YOUR CRUMBLING HOVEL!...



NO LODGINGS HERE, DWARF... THERE'S AN INN TEN MILES DOWN THE ROAD...



CEREBUS DOES NOT WISH TO RENT LODGINGS... CEREBUS WISHES TO BUY A HOVEL!

NOW



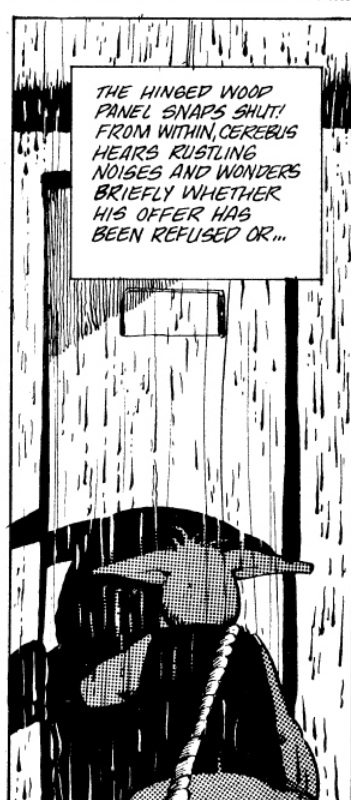
HAH! I OWN AN ACRE AND A HALF OF PRIME PARMOC VINEYARDS

WHERE WOULD AN UGLY FREAK LIKE YOU GET ENOUGH MONEY TO...

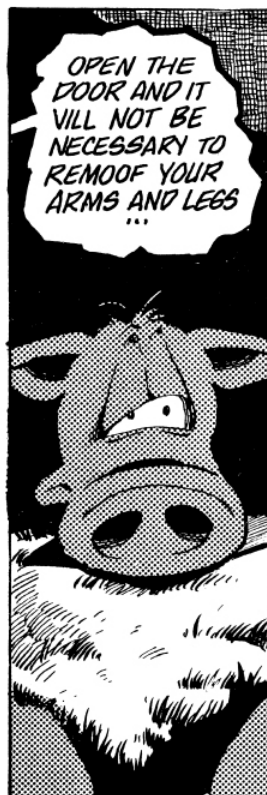


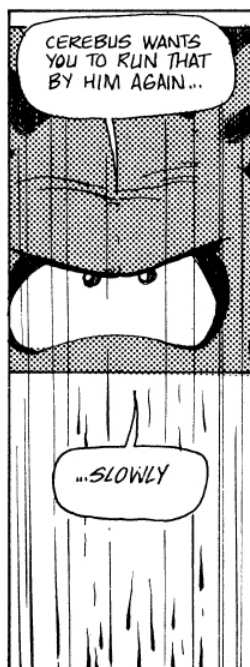
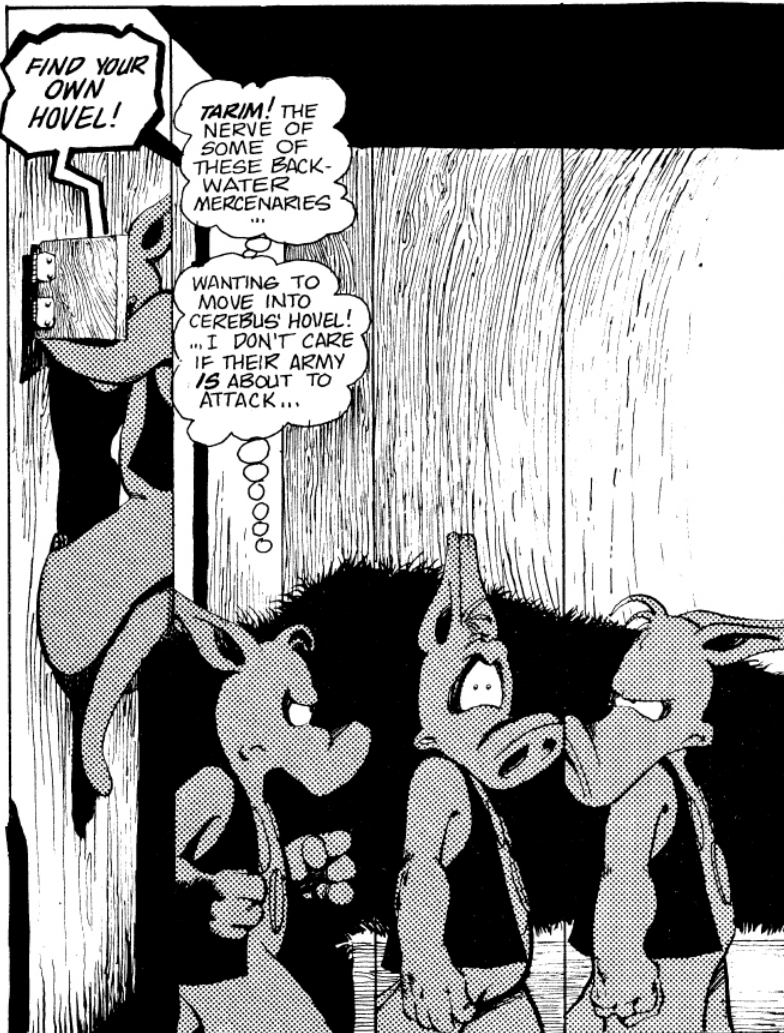
FOUR PIECES OF GOLD...

TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT...



THE HINGED WOOD PANEL SNAPS SHUT! FROM WITHIN, CEREBUS HEARS RUSTLING NOISES AND WONDERS BRIEFLY WHETHER HIS OFFER HAS BEEN REFUSED OR...





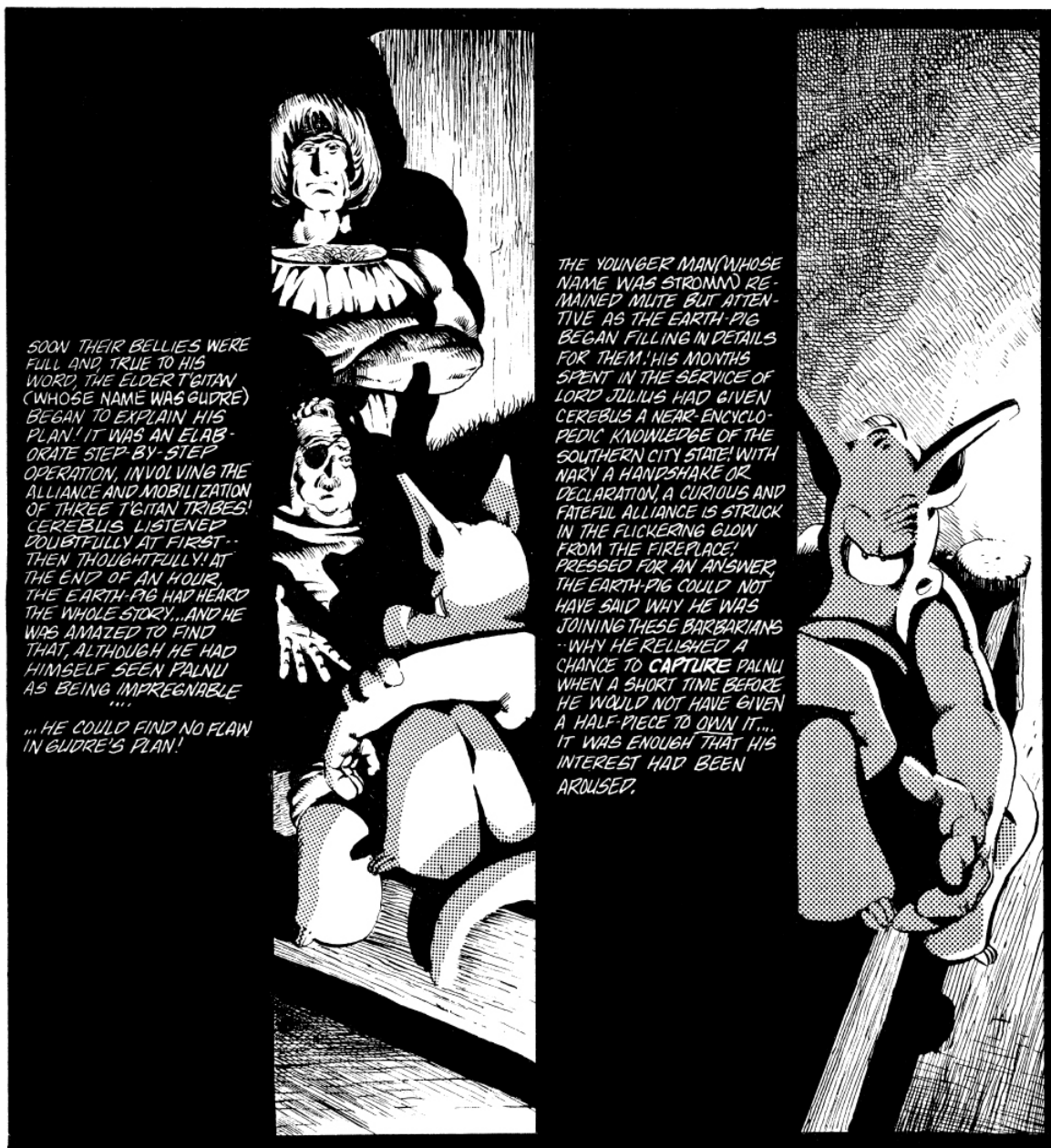


CEREBUS PONDERES THE OFFER BRIEFLY... THE ACCENT AND INFLECTION WAS T'GITAN AND HE DIDN'T RELISH ENDURING AN INTERMINABLE HARANGUE ON THE VIRTUES OF FOREST LIVING...

DO YOU HAVE ANY **FOOD?**

I AM AFRAIT ALL WE HAFF ISS A FEW POUNDS OF BEEF UND MUTTON AND A FEW LOAFS OF **FR-FRESH BREAT...**

ON THE OTHER HAND, MUSES CEREBUS ONE CAN NEVER FIND OUT TOO MUCH ABOUT OTHER CULTURES...



SOON THEIR BELLIES WERE FULL AND, TRUE TO HIS WORD, THE ELDER T'GITAN (WHOSE NAME WAS GUDRE) BEGAN TO EXPLAIN HIS PLAN! IT WAS AN ELABORATE STEP-BY-STEP OPERATION, INVOLVING THE ALLIANCE AND MOBILIZATION OF THREE T'GITAN TRIBES! CEREBUS LISTENED DOUBTFULLY AT FIRST... THEN THOUGHTFULLY! AT THE END OF AN HOUR, THE EARTH-PIG HAD HEARD THE WHOLE STORY... AND HE WAS AMAZED TO FIND THAT, ALTHOUGH HE HAD HIMSELF SEEN PALNU AS BEING IMPREGNABLE...

... HE COULD FIND NO FLAW IN GUDRE'S PLAN!

THE YOUNGER MAN, WHOSE NAME WAS STORNN, REMAINED MUTE BUT ATTENTIVE AS THE EARTH-PIG BEGAN FILLING IN DETAILS FOR THEM. HIS MONTHS SPENT IN THE SERVICE OF LORD JULIUS HAD GIVEN CEREBUS A NEAR-ENCYCLOPEDIA KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOUTHERN CITY STATE! WITH NARY A HANDSHAKE OR DECLARATION, A CURIOUS AND FATEFUL ALLIANCE IS STRUCK IN THE FLICKERING GLOW FROM THE FIREPLACE! PRESSED FOR AN ANSWER, THE EARTH-PIG COULD NOT HAVE SAID WHY HE WAS JOINING THESE BARBARIANS... WHY HE RELISHED A CHANCE TO **CAPTURE PALNU** WHEN A SHORT TIME BEFORE HE WOULD NOT HAVE GIVEN A HALF-PIECE TO OWN IT... IT WAS ENOUGH THAT HIS INTEREST HAD BEEN AROUSED.

UND NOW YOU WOULD
~~PR~~ROBABLY WISH TO KNOW
THE NITTY-GRITTY OF
OUR PRESENT SITUATION

OUR FIRST TARGET
WILL BE THE BORDER
CITY OF FLUROC
WHICH ISS WHERE...

FLUROC? BUT THAT
MEANS YOU'LL BE
FACING COMMANDER
KRULL... ISN'T...

RARRR!

SNAP CRACK CRUNCH

SOMETHING SEEMS
TO HAVE RUBBED
STROMM THE
WRONG WAY...

I AM VERY SORRY
ABOUT YOUR CHAIR--
~~BAD STROMM--BAD~~
STROMM!



UNH!
UNH!
UNH!

STROMM-- IT ISS
ME, YOUR PAPA!
OPEN YOUR MOUTH
KINDISCH...

UNH!

DOTS DER BIG
BOY-- CHUST A TINY
BIT MORE!...



UNH?

SINCE HE VASS
A BABY ONLY
ONE WAY COULD
I CONTROL
HIM AND HISS
~~TER~~-RIBLE
TEMPER...!



MMMMMM

MITOUT ORANCHE
CRREAM CANDIES,
I SHUDDER TO
THINK WHAT
~~TR~~-ROUBLE I
MIGHT HAVE
HAT WITH HIM!

OUTSIDE YOU GO
NOW... I HAVE
SOME THINKS I
WISH TO TALK
ABOUT...



HE'S YOUR
SON, THEN?

ACH! I FORBOT TO
MENTION -- ~~JA~~--
STROMM ISS MEIN
OWN LITTLE LIEBCHEN!



I MUST ASK YOU
TO *NOT* SAY THAT
NAME AROUND
STROMM...ZENZITIVE
HE ISS ZINCE THE
INZIDENT AT...

...GHETTY'S
POINT!



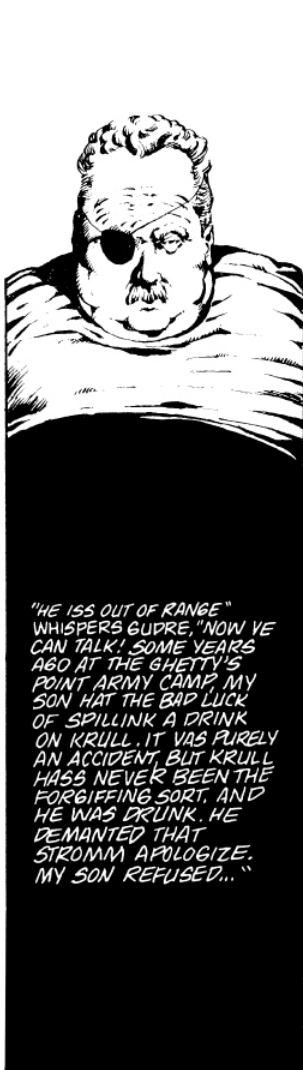
EH?



VOT A
RELIEF!...

NO
PR-OPERTY
DAMATCH
THIS TIME!

I DO, HOWEVER,
APOLOGIZE FOR
THE DENT IN YOUR
COW...



"HE ISS OUT OF RANGE"
WHISPERS GUDRE, "NOW YE
CAN TALK! SOME YEARS
AGO AT THE GHETTY'S
POINT ARMY CAMP MY
SON HAT THE BAD LUCK
OF SPILLINK A DRINK
ON KRULL. IT WAS PURELY
AN ACCIDENT, BUT KRULL
HASS NEVER BEEN THE
FORGIFFING SORT, AND
HE WAS DRUNK. HE
DEMANED THAT
STROMM APOLOGIZE.
MY SON REFUSED..."



"AND KRULL
HAD HIS
TONGUE
CUT OUT ON
THE SPOT"



MMMM.
GRIM BUSINESS
THAT...

GRIM? ACH! GRIM
IS NOT THE WORD
FOR IT...!

FOR MONTHS, STROMM DID
NOTHING EXCEPT SIT AROUND ALL
DAY MOUTHING OBSCENITIES...





THE NEXT DAY
DAWNS RADIANT
AND CLEAR...



UNFORTUNATELY, BY THE TIME
CEREBUS AND GUDRE ARE
WENDING THEIR WAY THROUGH
THE WOODS IT IS WET AND
MISERABLE AGAIN...

CEREBUS JUST
THOUGHT OF SOMETHING.
IF STROMM HASN'T GOT
A TONGUE, HOW DO THE
ORANGE CREAMS CALM
HIM DOWN?

IT ISS THE TEXTURE HE
REMEMBERS... SORT OF
MAKES THINKS EASIER
FOR ME...

IF I'M OUT OFF
ORANCHE CREAMS, I
USE ZUMTHINK
ELTZE...

AN OFFER/RIPE BANANA
CHUNK, A LUMP OF SOGGY
OATMEAL; YOU NAME IT.
IF IT'S SOFT UND SQVISHY
IT VILL CALM HIM
DOWN.



GUDRE.

HAIL
STROMM
GOTT OF
THUNDER!

HAIL
STROMM.

GOD OF
THUNDER?



ZO! VOT DEFENSIS
HASS KRULL COME
UP WITH TO TRY
UND...

NONE.



NONE?

I
KNOW.

I CANNOT
BELIEF IT
MYSELF
ALMOST.



BUT THERE ARE NO
GUARTS ON THE WALLS
-- NO FORTIFICASHUNTS
ON DER GATES. I HAF
SEEN TREE-FORTS
THAT ARE BETTER
DEFENTED...





SOMETHING ISS RRANCID
IN DAVIN...

KRULL KNOWS THAT VE ARE
AMASSING AN ARMY-- WHERE
ARE HISS TR-RICKS? SURELY
HE DOES NOT INTENT TO GIFF
UP MITOUT A FIGHT?

I DO NOT
UNDERSTAND
THIS...



NO GUARTS
-- NOTHINK
MOVINK IN
THE CITY
AT ALL...

LIKE
EFRYONE
HASS
GONE



AN
EFACUATION?
HOW MANY
PEOPLE HAF
LEFT THE
CITY
ZINCE...



IT ISS WINTER. THE ROAD
WILL BE EMPTY FOR SEFERAL
MONTHS YET...

I SAW TWO PRIESTS LEAVE
THE CITY EARLY THIS MORNINK,
BUT NO ONE ELTZE HASS
LEFT WHILE I...

PRIESTS?
DID YOU SAY
TWO PRIESTS?



JA! PRIESTS
...VHY DO YOU
ASK?



THESE ARE THE
HIGH HOLY DAYS--
FROM MIDWINTER
TO CONCORDANCE
EVE...

NO PRIEST IS
ALLOWED TO
EAT SALTED
NUTS...

COMMENT
ON THE
WEATHER...



OR LEAVE
HIS PLACE
OF MEDITATION



THEN
WHO...?

CEREBUS IS
WILLING TO
BET IT'S
KRULL AND
SOME
ASSISTANT

BUT...
VHY?

YOU SAID LORD
JULIUS WAS MOVING
HIS TROOPS TO THE
ONLIU BORDER-- DO
YOU KNOW THE
ROUTE THEY ARE
USING?





ARE YOU
GETTING
ALL THIS
DOWN GRIMES?

YESSIR,
COMMANDER.

"KRULL APPROACHED
THE BRIDGE AS
RAIN CONTINUED
TO FALL..."



"FLUROC AGAIN FACED
A GRAVE CRISIS AND
HE KNEW THAT, ONCE
MORE, AS THE GREATEST
MILITARY GENIUS OF
HIS TIME THAT HE..."



"SUDDENLY
HE PAUSED!"

"HIS EYES NARROWED
TO THIN SLITS OF
WHITE-HOT INTENSITY"

"TO A LESSER MAN'S
EARS IT MIGHT HAVE
SEEMED NOTHING
MORE THAN THE
RANDOM SNAPPING
OF A TWIG..."



"BUT HE WAS KRULL,
DEFENDER OF RIGHT
AND JUSTICE AND
YEARS OF TRAINING
HAD HONED HIS
SENSES TO RAZOR-
SHARPNESS"

"HIS CAPE BLOWING
IMPRESSIVELY, HE
SWEEPED FORWARD."

COME ALONG,
GRIMES!

YES,
SIR...

COMING,
SIR...



"KRULL SCANNED THE WOODS, THERE
WAS THE SMELL OF IMMINENT
DEATH AND BLOODSHED IN THE
AIR, EVEN NOW DOZENS OF T'GITAN
ASSASSINS MIGHT BE EDGING..."

P. PERHAPS SIR I SHOULD
RETURN TO FLUROC SO I
AM NOT IN YOUR WAY WHEN...



ARE YOU... SUGGESTING...
GRIMES, THAT I SHOULD
DELAY DICTATING MY
MEMOIRS...

JUST BECAUSE
THERE IS A CHANCE
OF YOUR GETTING
TORN LIMBS FROM
LIMB BY BARBARIANS?



NOWB! NOWB!
WUBBA WUBBA
WUBBAHUBBA
TUBBATOBAN
WIMBUM WIM
BABAWBANIANS

I CAN'T TELL
YOU HOW HAPPY I
AM TO HEAR YOU
SAY THAT...


I WAS STARTING
TO GET VERY WORRIED
ABOUT YOUR CONTINUED
GOOD HEALTH, GRIMES.











WHAT-- uh-- SORT
OF POSITION WERE
YOU THINKING
OF?


ACTUALLY, CEREBUS WAS
THINKING OF MAKING
YOU SUPERVISOR OF
PRISONERS OF WAR...

THAT SOUNDS LIKE
A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITY
-- HOW MANY PRISONERS
OF WAR DO YOU HAVE?



JUST *THIS* ONE -- BUT
FROM WHAT CEREBUS
HAS HEARD, HE SHOULD
BE A HANDFUL...

OF COURSE, YOU
MIGHT HAVE SOME
IDEAS ON HOW TO
KEEP HIM FROM
ESCAPING...

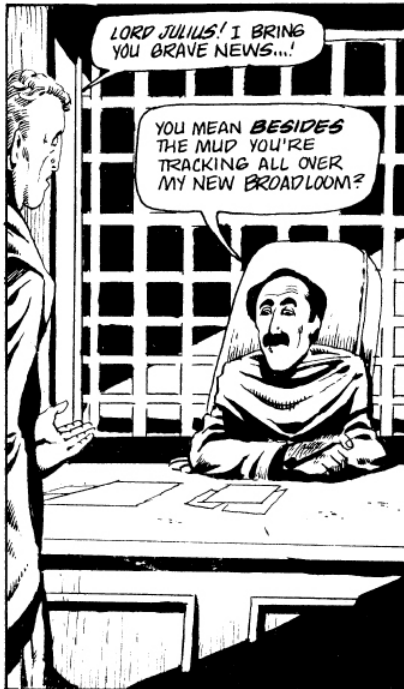


WELL, HANDCUFFS WITH
LOCKS ARE OUT. WHEN HE
WAS CAPTURED BY LOWER
FELDANG, HE PICKED THE
LOCK ON HIS CUFFS
WITH HIS EYETOOTH...

AND OF COURSE, HIS
FINGERNAILS SHOULD
BE KEPT TRIMMED..
HMM... WHAT ELSE?

EPilogue

A WEEK LATER, IN LORD JULIUS' PRIVATE OFFICE IN PALNU...





FLUROC

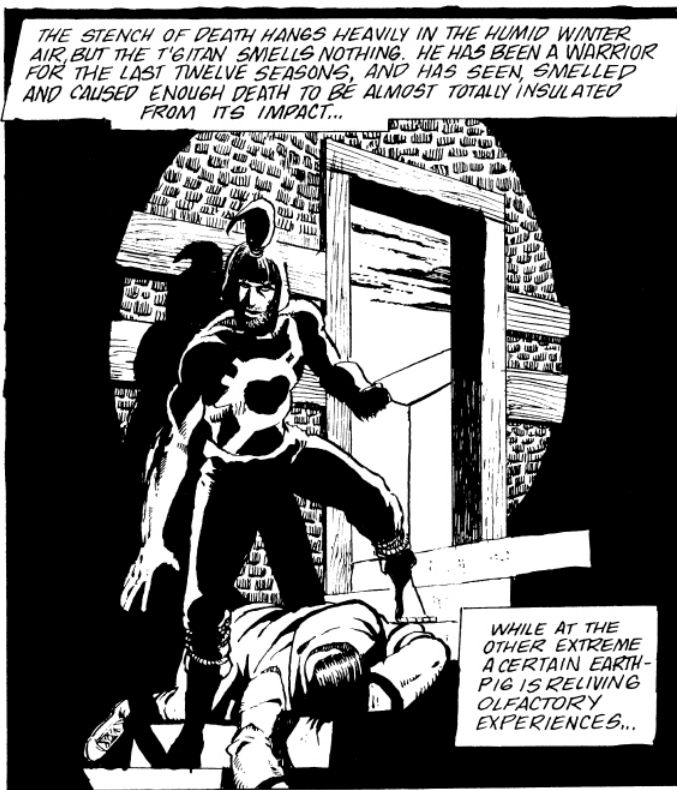
THE EASTERN GATE STOOD OPEN AS THE SUN DRIFTED DOWN TO THE HORIZON! IT HAD BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE THE T'GITAN HORDE HAD RUSHED THAT GATE...

...THREE DAYS SINCE THE LAST OF FLUROC'S RESIDENTS HAD FALLEN BEFORE THE KNIVES, SWORDS AND WEIGHTED SPEARS OF THE PAINTED HALF-NAKED SAVAGES. THERE IS NO SOUND OF CONQUERING FOOTSTEPS...

ALMOST ALL OF THE VICTORIOUS T'GITANS HAVE RETURNED TO THE SURROUNDING WOODS, THERE TO GAMBLE THEIR LOOT (SUCH AS IT WAS) AND DRINK MORE WINE AND BEER SO RECENTLY LIBERATED FROM PALNU'S MOST NORTHERLY-PLACED BASTION...

ZERBUTZ!

...WHILE INSIDE THE WALL BARELY A HANDFUL REMAIN, SIFTING THROUGH THE DEBRIS IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER KIND OF LOOT...

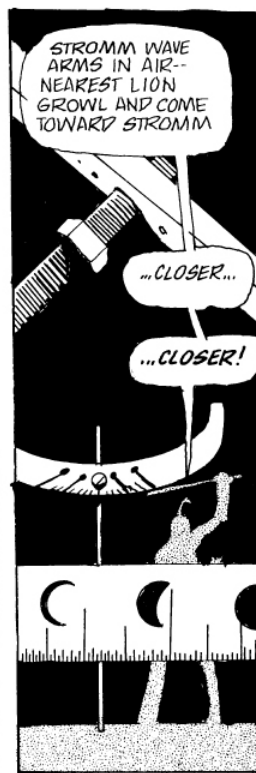




WHAT ABOUT GUDRE?



GUDRE IS STROMM'S FIRST FOLLOWER. STROMM SAFE GUDRE FROM MANY LIONS... STROMM STARE AT LIONS. LIONS STOP.



STROMM WAVE ARMS IN AIR-- NEAREST LION GROWL AND COME TOWARD STROMM

...CLOSER...

...CLOSER!



NOW GUDRE SPEAK FOR STROMM IN GREAT COUNCIL ...

GUDRE BRINGS US STROMM'S WORD...

STROMM DOESN'T TALK MUCH HIMSELF DOES HE?



STROMM BARES HISS TEETH! LION LEAP! ... BUT STROMM HASS ALREADY HISS SWORD OUT...

SHLUMP!

SWORD CUTS OFF LEB!

SHLUMP!

SWORD CUTS OFF HET!



SWORD BECOMES BLUR ... LIONS DROPPINK LIKE FLIES

SOON ALL ARE DET...

'THANK YOU, THANK YOU,' SAY GUDRE

STROMM MAKE GUDRE LIFE-LONK COMPANION UND MALE SECRETARY...



STROMM NOT TALK AT ALL!
--THUNTER GOTT SAY VLN
WORD UND HE WUT KNOCK
WHOLE BUILDING OFER-- HE
SAY "BUT MORNINK" UND
MOUNTAIN RANGE WUT
CR-RUMPLE...!



STROMM VERY CAREFUL--
THUNTER GOTT MUST NOT
EFEN **BELCH**-- COULT
DESTROY HALF OFF ARMY
BY AC-CIDENT...

NEIN?

CEREBUS HAD
NO IDEA THE LIFE
OF A THUNDER
GOD WAS SO...

...COMPLICATED.

CEREBUS MARVELS
AT GUDRE'S HANDY-
WORK-- HE HAD
EFFECTIVELY MADE
STROMM THE FOCUS
OF ALL OF THE
WARRIORS' ATTENTION...

...AND LEFT HIMSELF
UNHAMPERED BY
POLITICAL DEBATES
IN THE PROCESS



WHAT DO YOU
SUPPOSE STROMM
HAS PLANNED?



GUDRE SAY "STROMM
REST," STROMM MEET
TIME TO GATHER
STRENGTH FOR
TRIAL AHEAT...

STROMM TELL
US HISS PLAN
WHEN TIME
ISS RIGHT...

IN THE MEANTIME, GUDRE WOULD
BE LEFT ALONE TO PLAN THE COMING
ASSAULT ON PALNU, MUSES THE
EARTH-PIG, WHILE STROMM'S
WARRIORS WAIT PATIENTLY...

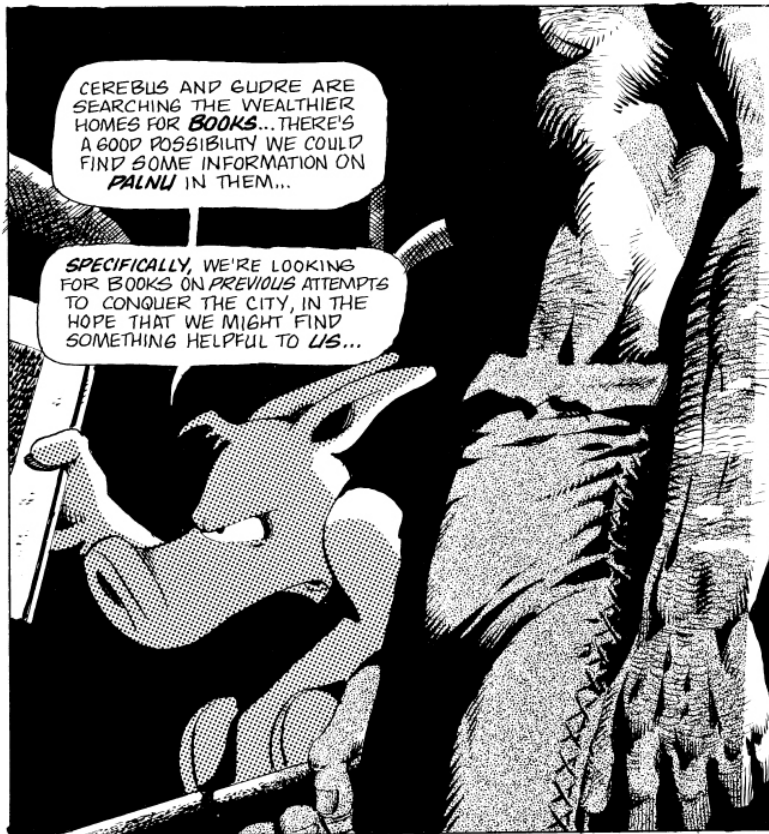


AND WHEN GUDRE
TELLS YOU THAT
STROMM IS
RESTED...?

GRAUS VILL BE READY.
FOLLOW STROMM--
DO VWHAT HASS TO
BE DONE...

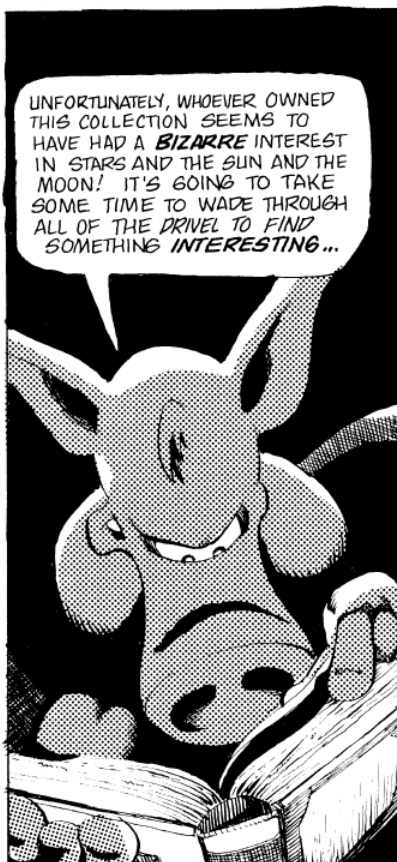


GRAUS NOT UNTERSTANT WHY YOU
STAY IN CITY-- NO MORE LOOT...
WOMEN ARE ALL COLD UND BLUE
UND STIFF...



CEREBUS AND GUDRE ARE
SEARCHING THE WEALTHIER
HOMES FOR **BOOKS**...THERE'S
A GOOD POSSIBILITY WE COULD
FIND SOME INFORMATION ON
PALNU IN THEM...

SPECIFICALLY, WE'RE LOOKING
FOR BOOKS ON *PREVIOUS* ATTEMPTS
TO CONQUER THE CITY, IN THE
HOPE THAT WE MIGHT FIND
SOMETHING HELPFUL TO *US*...



UNFORTUNATELY, WHOEVER OWNED
THIS COLLECTION SEEMS TO
HAVE HAD A **BIZARRE** INTEREST
IN STARS AND THE SUN AND THE
MOON! IT'S GOING TO TAKE
SOME TIME TO WADE THROUGH
ALL OF THE DRIVEL TO FIND
SOMETHING **INTERESTING**...



GRAUS STILL NOT
UNTERSTANT...



GUDRE SAY "WE
NEED MAGIC
TO BEAT PALNU!
WE GO LOOK"

MAGIC HERE
SOMEWHERE!
CEREBUS LOOK
FOR **STRONG**
MAGIC!

WHEN WE FIND
MAGIC, SMASH
PALNU INTO SMALL
PIECES.

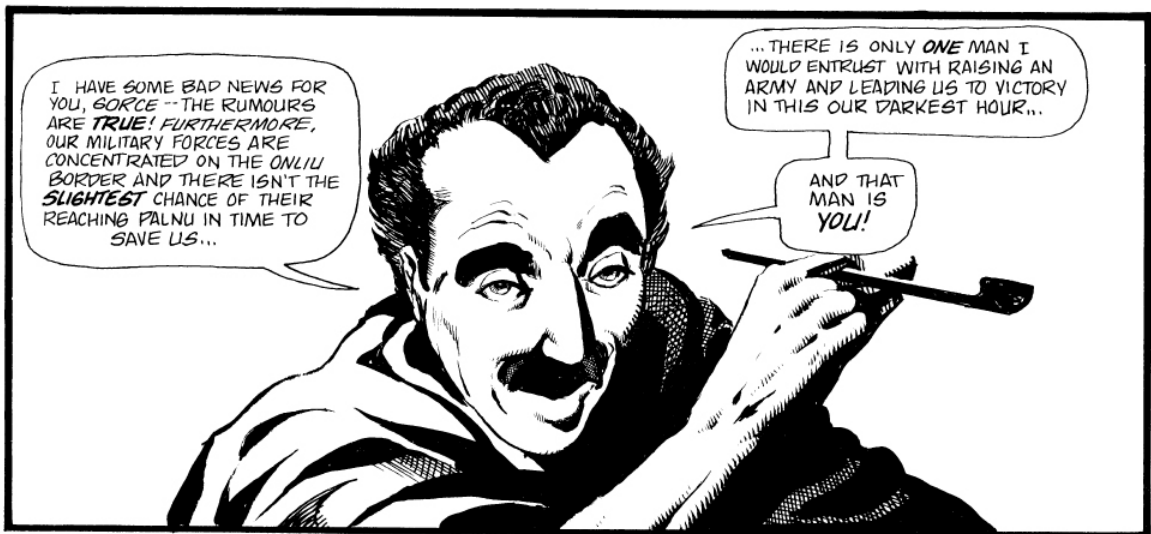
NO ONE GET
AWAY!

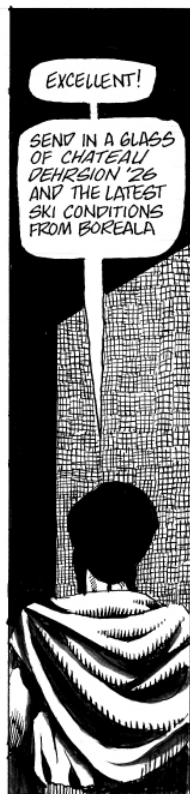
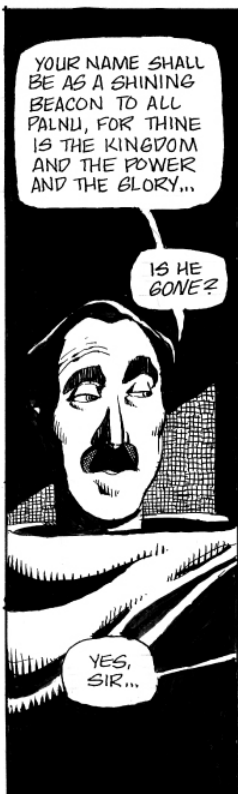
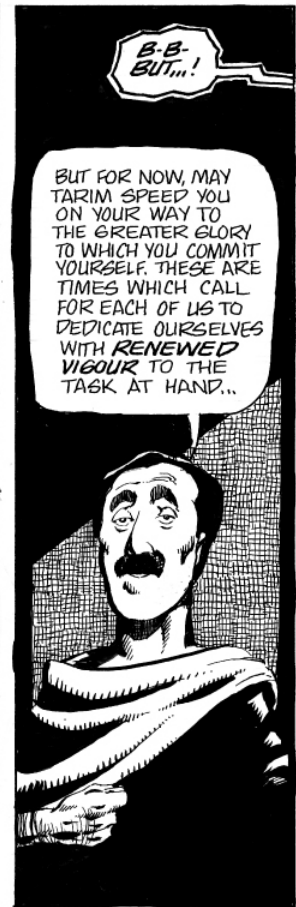
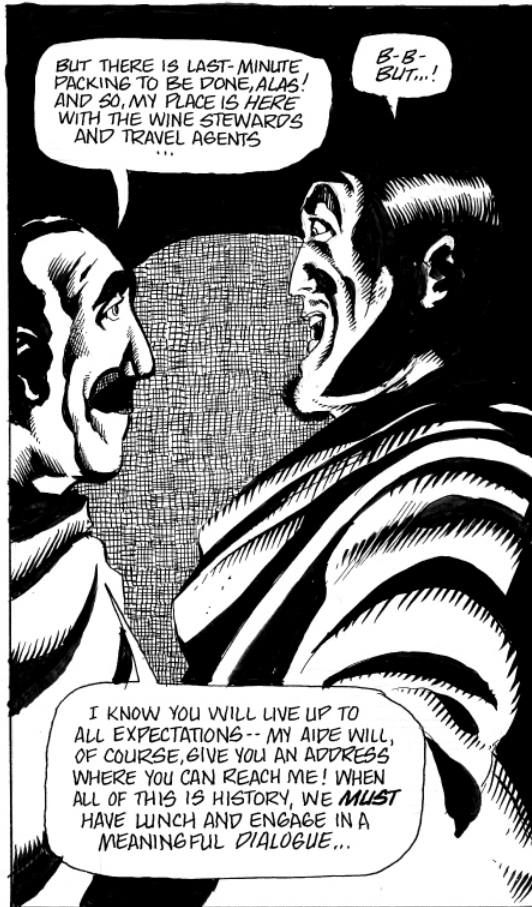


NOW GRAUS
UNTERSTANT.

WHY YOU NOT SAY
SO IN FIRST PLACE?

MEANWHILE, IN PALNU, LORD JULIUS PREPARES FOR THE HORDE OF T'GITANS HE KNOWS ARE COMING, PROBABLY BEFORE SPRING...







CER-REBUTZ, MY
FRIENT-- I HOPE YOU
HAFF FOUNT SOME-
THINK...!

A PASSAGE IN
ONE BOOK--
NOTHING
MORE...

ACH...

I AM AFRAIT I HAFF MATE
A GRAFE ERROR IN
CHUDGEMENT-- FLUROC'S
WEALTH HAFF BEEN
GR-REATLY OFERESTIMATED!



HAVING EXAMINT DER LOOT THAT WAS TAKEN,
IT ISS MY CONSIDERT OPINION THAT VE WILL
BE LUCKY IF VE ARE ABLE TO AFFORT TO HIRE
ONE CAVALRYMAN...

AND THEN ONLY IFF
HE PROVIDES HISS
OWN HORSE...



CEREBUS HAS
MARKED THE
PLACE...

...THE INFORMATION MAY
BE USEFUL IF IT ISN'T
OUT OF DATE...

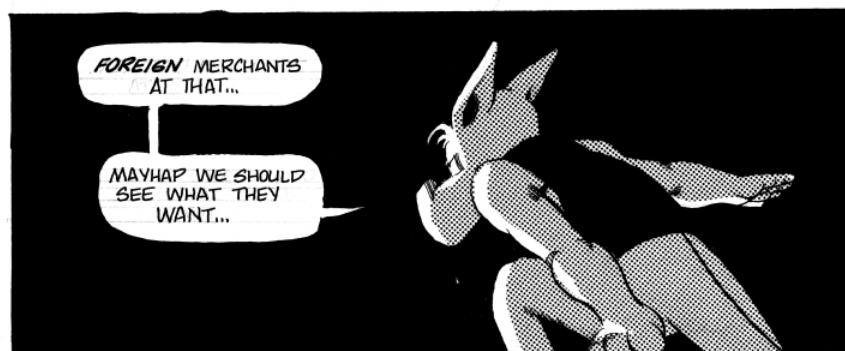
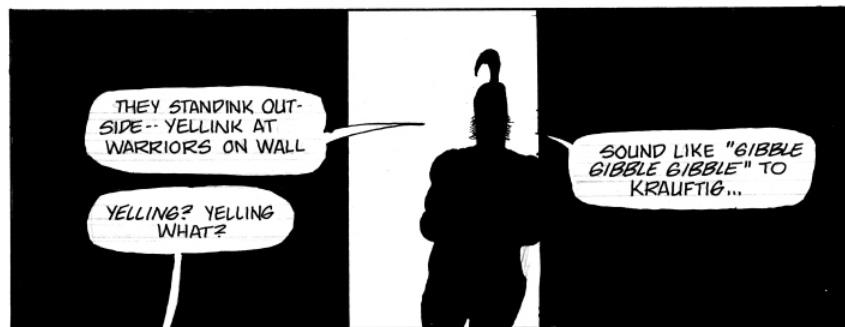


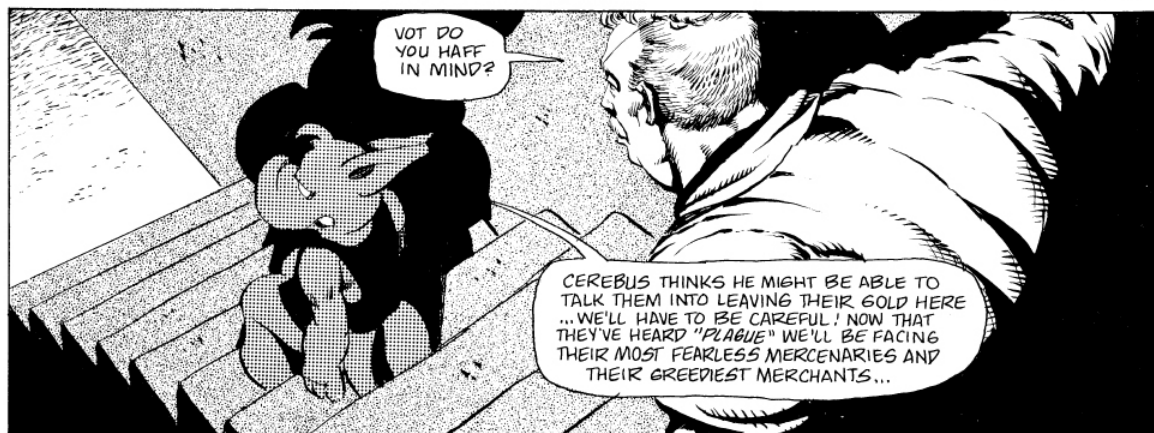
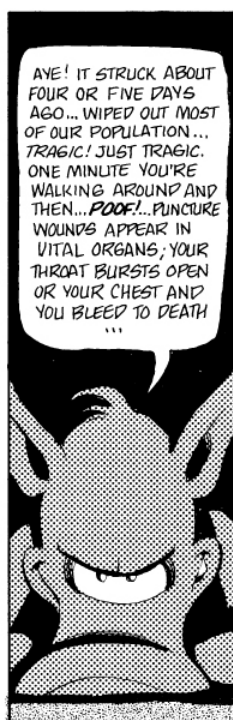
A BLEAK
SITUATION, THEN?

JA... PR-RETTY
BLEAK...



HAIL
STROMM!













I SUGGEST THAT YOU HAVE HIM REMOVED -- AND, IF POSSIBLE, WE SHOULD DOUBLE HIS RATIONS FOR THE NEXT MONTH...

I THINK HE WILL BE MOST PLEASANT WITH THAT -- HOWEVER, PERHAPS YOU SHOULD EXPLAIN YOUR JUSTICE TO ...THEM!...



THE T'GITANS STOOD WITH EYES RIVETED ON THE EARTH-PIG! HIS PERFORMANCE HAD WORKED WONDERS WITH THE N'GAMIN WHO JABBERED EXCITEDLY ABOUT HIS BRAVERY AND QUICKNESS...

THE DISGUISED T'GITANS, HOWEVER, HAD JUST SEEN ONE OF STROMM'S CHOSEN OFFICERS BERATE A WARRIOR IN A FOREIGN TONGUE... AND THEN BATTER HIM INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS!

FOR HIS PART, GUDRE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO YET ANOTHER DISPLAY OF THE EARTH-PIG'S INGENUITY! HIGH QUALITY ENTERTAINMENT WAS HARD TO COME BY...



CEREBUS PUNISH SCHWAGERIN...

SCHWAGERIN STEAL WINE SKIN FROM CEREBUS...

THAT NOT SCHWAGERIN...

THAT LIEBSCHAFT!



MMM.

CEREBUS MAKE BIG MISTAKE. CEREBUS MUCH SORRY...

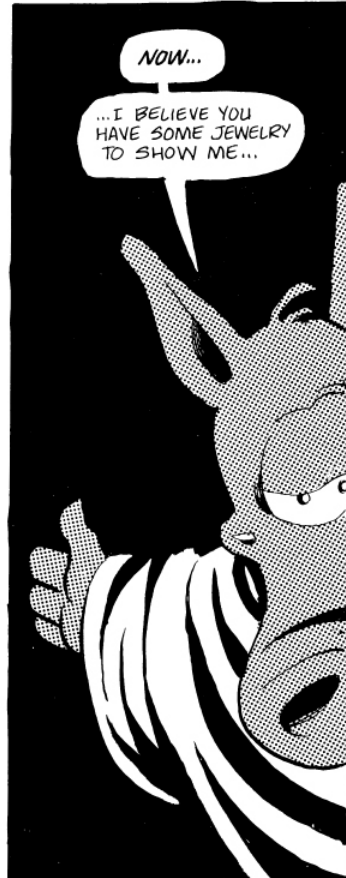
CEREBUS GIVE LIEBSCHAFT TWO WINE-SKINS WHEN HE WAKE UP...



NOW IT WAS THE TURN OF THE T'GITANS TO ENTHUSE ABOUT THIS IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY OF HUMILITY AND FAIRNESS AS CEREBUS RETURNED TO THE BUSINESS AT HAND...

YOU SEEM TO HAVE A REMARKABLE CONTROL OVER DIFFICULT SITUATIONS...

AND THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE SITUATION IS MORE DIFFICULT THAN IT APPEARS...



NOW...

...I BELIEVE YOU HAVE SOME JEWELRY TO SHOW ME...



AS YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE, THESE ARE SOME OF THE FINEST AND MOST *DELICATE* EXAMPLES OF THE JEWELLER'S CRAFT...



I WOULD ASK THAT YOU EXAMINE EACH LINK-- THERE ARE VIRTUALLY NO FLAWS! OF COURSE RESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN NOTED FOR...

STRANGE.



STRANGE?

WHAT IS STRANGE?

NOTHING! NOTHING! uh-- CEREBUS WISHES TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THIS OWL...



AH, THE OWL! YOU HAVE THE EYE OF A *CONNOISSEUR*! A CLASSIC PIECE SCULPTED WITH INFINITE CARE AND ADORNED BY THE FINEST...

DID YOU CUT YOURSELF SHAVING, MY FRIEND?



WHY-- NO! WHAT ON EARTH WOULD MAKE YOU THINK THAT I HAD...?

THERE'S...



...**BLOOD** ON YOUR NECK...

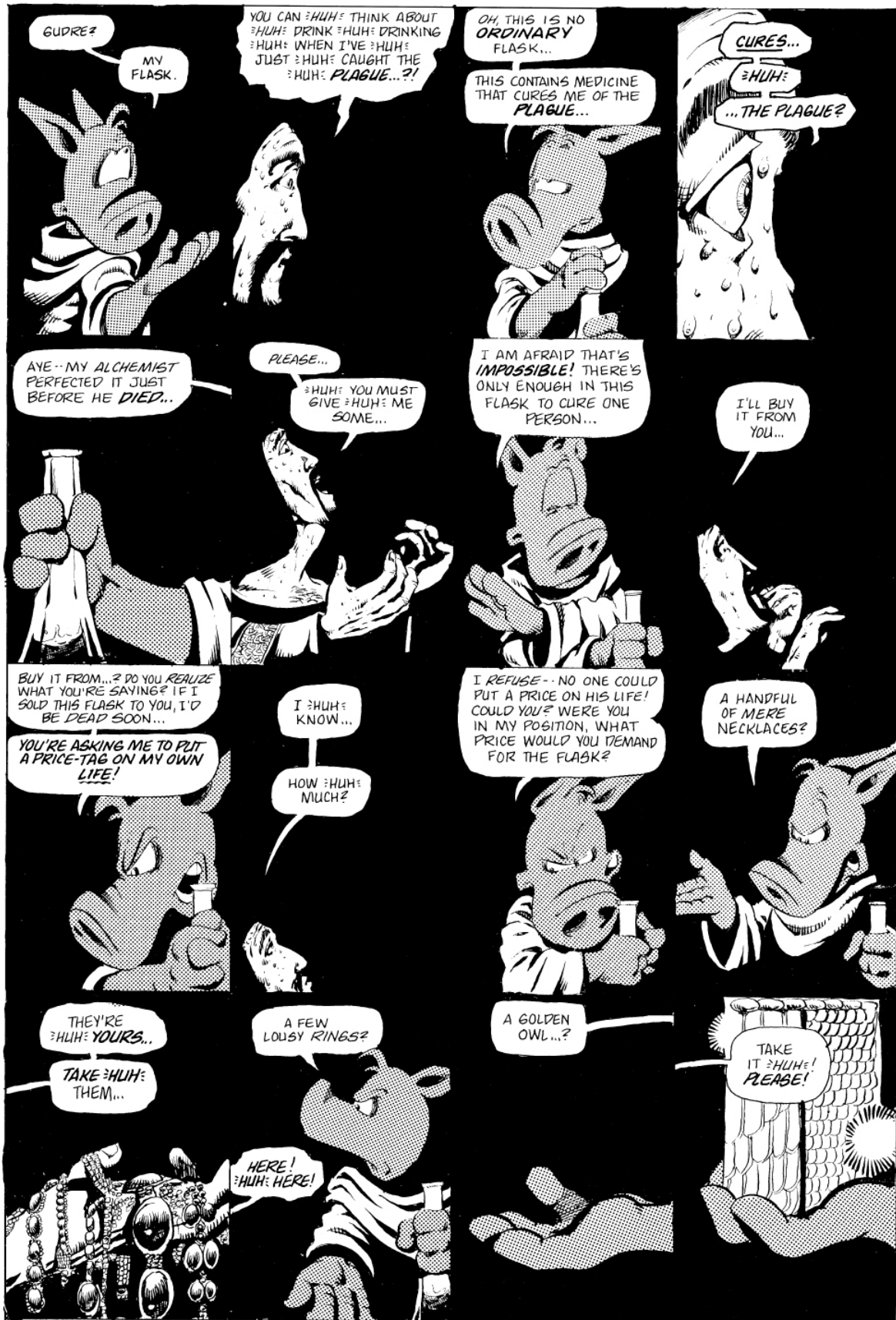
BLOOD? NOW WHERE COULD I HAVE...



OH, NO! IS--IS IT... COULD IT BE THE R...P...P...

HIGHLY UNLIKELY... THE SUDDEN ERUPTION OF BLOOD IS ONLY ONE OF THE SYMPTOMS...







SOME HOURS
LATER...

UNCUT
DIAMONDS...

MY SILK
HANDKERCHIEF...

PLEASE!
IT'S ALL I
HAVE...



WHAT ZERBUTZ
SAY TO FOP-
WHO-SMELL-LIKE
-FLOWERS?

I DO NOT KNOW -- BUT
VHATEFER IT VAS, IT
SEEMS TO BE VORKING!



BUT SURELY A LIFE
MEANS MORE THAN
A PILE OF BAUBLES!
WOULD YOU THINK ME
UNREASONABLE IF
I ASKED FOR YOUR
GUARDS' HELMETS
AS WELL?



YOU **HEARD** HIM --
HAVE YOUR MEN
SURRENDER THEIR
HELMETS...

YOU HAVE BOUGHT OUR **SERVICES**--
NOT OUR **ARMOUR**! WHAT COULD
YOU DO ABOUT IT IF WE WERE
TO REFUSE?



I - COULD-
BREATH-
ON-YOU-



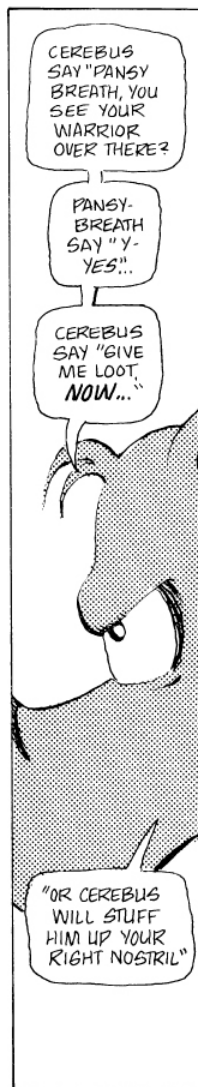
CLANK
CLANG



VERY WELL -- PERHAPS THESE
FEW TRINKETS WILL CONSOLE
THE SURVIVORS STILL LEFT
AFTER I HAVE PASSED FROM
THIS MORTAL COIL...

YOU BETTER
GO BEFORE
I CHANGE
MY MIND!

CERTAINLY! OH
THANK YOU,
THANK YOU!



CEREBUS SURVEYED THE CROWD GATHERING
AROUND HIM, HANGING ON EVERY WORD OF
HIS TALE OF BRAVADO AND DARING...

HE HAD ORIGINALLY THOUGHT
GUDRE A GENIUS FOR HIS
ABILITY TO UNITE THESE
BARBARIANS...

PERHAPS IT WAS NOT AS DIFFICULT
AS IT APPEARED AT FIRST GLANCE
...AND PERHAPS IN THE NEAR
FUTURE...

THEN, CEREBUS
SAY "YOU SEE
FLASK?"

"UH-HUH", SAY
PANSY BREATH.

"CEREBUS ALWAYS
WONDER HOW MANY
POINTY-HEAD WARRIORS
WOULD FIT IN ONE.."

AND THEY
GIVE YOU
HELMETS...

GRAUS SEE!
GRAUS REMEMBER!

THERE MIGHT BE ROOM FOR
ANOTHER "GOTT OF THUNTER"
IN THIS ARMY..

CEREBUS THE HAREDVARK

SHE-DEVIL IN THE SHADOWS

NOW THAT THEY WERE **IN** TOGETH CEREBUS WAS NOT QUITE SO HAPPY THAT GRAUS HAD ACCOMPANIED HIM... HE **HAD**, OF COURSE, SAVED CEREBUS THE TROUBLE OF HAVING TO CARRY SOME HUNDRED POUNDS OF FINE JEWELRY. BUT, BEDAZZLED BY THE MYRIAD ATTRACTIONS OF A BIG CITY, GRAUS HAD QUICKLY BECOME MORE TROUBLE THAN HE WAS WORTH...

AWAITING WORD FROM THE DUKE OF AGERDEN ON THE TRADE VALUE OF THE ASSORTED TRINKETS AND BAUBLES, CEREBUS HAD BEEN FORCED TO INVEST SEVERAL HOURS IN SEARCH OF HIS IMPULSIVE COMPANION!

HI, THERE...
REMEMBER
ME?

ZERBUTZ! PERCE
ISS TELLINK
FORTUNE OFF GRAUS!

DARE CEREBUS
INQUIRE AS TO THE
STATE OF OUR FOOD
AND LODGINGS
MONEY...?

ISS GONE, BUT NOT WORRY
...GRAUS FINT BREAT CRUSTS
IN GARBAGE WAGON UND ALLEY-
WAY NEARBY VITH MUCH STRAW

CEREBUS HEAVES A SIGH-- HE
HADN'T REALLY EXPECTED ANY
OF THE MONEY TO BE LEFT...
WELL, WITH ANY LUCK THEIR
BUSINESS WOULD BE FINISHED
SOON AND THEY...

PERHAPS, *GRAUS*--
YOUR FRIEND WOULD
LIKE HIS FORTUNE
TOLD...?

CEREBUS DOES
NOT *APPROVE* OF
YOUR LIVELIHOOD...

TAKING IN--?
I MAKE FIVE GOLD
PIECES IN A GOOD NIGHT

WHAT DO YOU
EXPECT ME TO
DO?

STARCH EVERY
LOIN-CLOTH IN
BOREALA...?

FORTUNE-TELLING?
IT IS AN HONEST WAY
TO MAKE A LIVING...
WHAT DON'T YOU...

YOU DON'T MEAN TO TELL
CEREBUS THAT *GRAUS*
SPENT THREE HOURS
DOWN HERE HAVING
HIS... FORTUNE TOLD?

HUH!
HUH!
HUH!

WELL? WHAT
ABOUT IT, YOU
SHORT, GRAY
PRUDE? I HAVE
TO PAY MY RENT
DON'T I?

THERE ARE
OTHER WAYS
FOR A YOUNG
GIRL TO PAY HER RENT

TAKING IN
LAUNDRY
FOR EXAMPLE

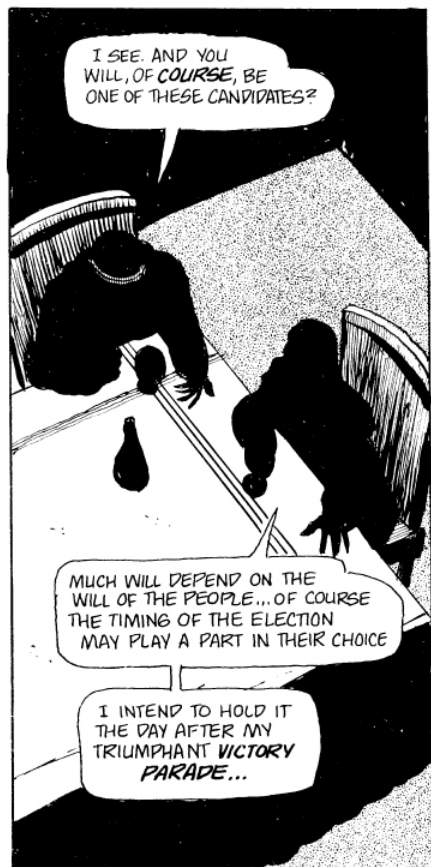
YOU FIND-
SOMETHING-
FUNNY-ABOUT
THAT?

NO!
NO!

GRAUS VAS uh
LAUGHINK AT
FUNNY CURTAINS

MEANWHILE, HUNDREDS OF MILES TO THE NORTH, LORD BORCE (LORD JULIUS' CHOICE TO RAISE AND LEAD AN ARMY AGAINST CEREBUS AND THE T'GITANS) CONFERES WITH COMMANDER SARTIE, HEAD OF SEAF'S MILITARY GOVERNMENT...







LORD GORCE?

HE'S GIVEN ME FULL CONTROL OF AN ARMY HARKER...

...AND THERE WILL BE NO OPPOSITION FROM SEAF WHEN THE PEOPLE PROCLAIM ME AS GRANDLORD...



EXCELLENT, SIR...!

EVERY SOLDIER WHO SWEARS EXCLUSIVE LOYALTY TO ME IS TO BE GIVEN DOUBLE HIS FIRST MONTH'S PAY... ALL WHO WOULD REMAIN LOYAL TO COMMANDER SARTE ARE TO BE EXECUTED... OH, AND HARKER...

SIR?



I THINK IT WOULD BE BEST TO SAY NOTHING UNTIL THEY ARE TWENTY MILES INSIDE OUR BORDER

IT WILL MAKE THEIR DECISION A LITTLE EASIER...



YES, SIR... WHERE DO WE GO NOW?

IANAG...

PRINCE SHOMBER HAS BEEN EAGER TO MOVE INTO OUR HOME-LAND RECENTLY. ANYTIME HE HAS TO GO FIVE YEARS WITHOUT AN EXPANSION OF HIS BORDER, HE BREAKS OUT IN HIVES...



I'LL OFFER HIM C'I'NUFINN PROVINCE IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME OF HIS LIGHT CAVALRY...

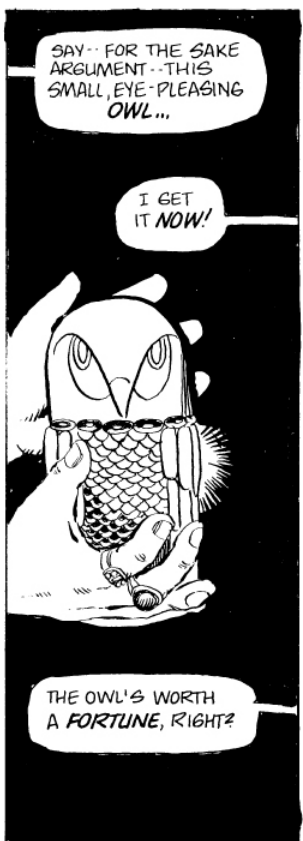
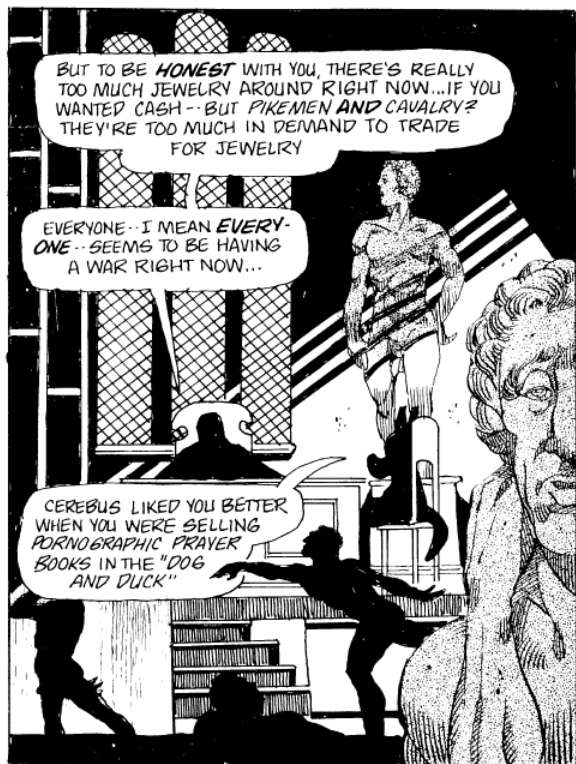
C'I'NUFINN PROVINCE! BUT, SIR, THE PEOPLE WOULD NEVER STAND FOR SUCH A...



YOU'RE NOT LISTENING, HARKER--I SAID I WOULD OFFER HIM C'I'NUFINN PROVINCE...

I NEVER SAID ANYTHING ABOUT GIVING HIM C'I'NUFINN PROVINCE ...

"YOU STAY HERE... CEREBUS IS GOING INSIDE, TALK TO DUKE OF AGERDEN, FIND OUT HOW MANY TROOPS WE GET FOR JEWELRY! AS SOON AS CEREBUS GET LETTER PROMISING TROOPS, WE GO BACK TO FORTUNE LADY'S! GET OUR STUFF AND GO HOME. BUT, UNTIL-THEN-YOU-STAY-HERE! IF CEREBUS COME OUT AND YOU ARE GONE, CEREBUS MAKE GRAUS-BURGERS OUT OF YOU! IF YOU UNDERSTAND, BLINK TWICE, AND THEN CEREBUS WILL LET GO OF YOUR TONGUE."



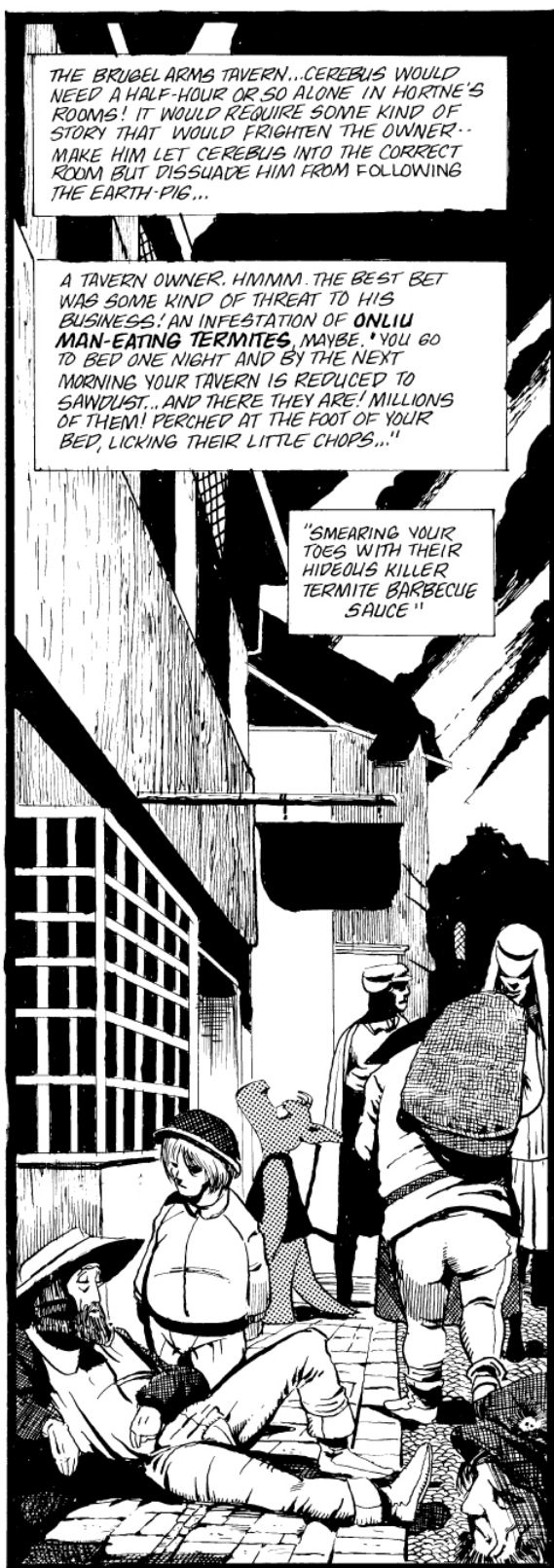


"CEREBUS GOING INSIDE HERE -- LOOKING FOR ROOM OF MAN NAMED HORTNE. CEREBUS IS TRYING STEAL ANOTHER GOLDEN OWL! YOU STAY HERE NEXT TO POST -- NOT GO AWAY ANYWHERE!" "GRAUS NOT UNTERSTANT. VHY DUSS DUKE PERSON NEET OWL WHEN ALREAYT YOU HAFF GIFFEN HIM VUN...?" "IF CEREBUS WANT GRAUS TO ASK STUPID QUESTIONS, CEREBUS WILL PULL ON GRAUS' LEASH THREE TIMES"

THE BRUGEL ARMS TAVERN... CEREBUS WOULD NEED A HALF-HOUR OR SO ALONE IN HORTNE'S ROOMS! IT WOULD REQUIRE SOME KIND OF STORY THAT WOULD FRIGHTEN THE OWNER... MAKE HIM LET CEREBUS INTO THE CORRECT ROOM BUT DISSUADE HIM FROM FOLLOWING THE EARTH-PIG...

A TAVERN OWNER, HMMM. THE BEST BET WAS SOME KIND OF THREAT TO HIS BUSINESS. AN INFESTATION OF **ONLIU MAN-EATING TERMITES**, MAYBE. *YOU GO TO BED ONE NIGHT AND BY THE NEXT MORNING YOUR TAVERN IS REDUCED TO SANDUST... AND THERE THEY ARE! MILLIONS OF THEM! PERCHED AT THE FOOT OF YOUR BED, LICKING THEIR LITTLE CHOPS..."

"SMEARING YOUR TOES WITH THEIR HIDEOUS KILLER TERMITE BARBECUE SAUCE"



BLESS THE LIVING TARIM!

YOU'RE HERE!

YOU'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING! THREE WEEKS! THREE WEEKS! ALL OF THE PEOPLE WHO'VE GONE DOWN THERE -- TH- THEY'VE NOT COME BACK UP AGAIN...!

DOWN THERE? TO THE CELLAR YOU MEAN?

AYE! THE CELLAR!! FIVE SOULS LOST!!

WHAT'S DOWN THERE? I MEAN ORDINARILY...

IT'S-- IT'S MASTER HORTNE'S APARTMENT!

YOU HAVEN'T SEEN ANY TERMITES AROUND, HAVE YOU?

WHAT?

NOTHING.





POOR MASTER HORTNE--
THREE WEEKS! HE'S
PROBABLY BEEN DEAD
ALL THIS TIME... KILLED
BY THAT... THAT...

HAS ANYONE SEEN
THE... WHATEVER
IT IS?

NO-- BUT YOU CAN HEAR
IT WHEN SOMEONE GOES
DOWN-- SILENCE AND THEN
THE SCREAMS-- HORRIBLE
BLOOD-CHILLING SCREAMS
...



I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU WHAT IT'S
DONE TO MY BUSINESS! NO ONE WILL
COME IN FOR A DRINK... EXCEPT WHEN
THE WORD SPREADS THAT SOMEONE
ELSE IS VENTURING DOWN THERE

THEN THE PLACE IS PACKED
WITH PEOPLE BETTING ON THE
TIME IT WILL TAKE FOR THE
SCREAMING TO START...



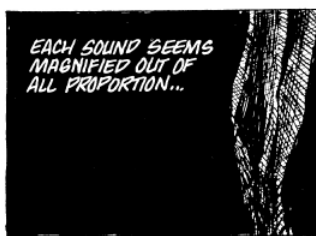
AN HOUR LATER, ARMED WITH A SWORD
THE EARTH-PIG DESCENDS INTO THE
STYGIAN GLOOM...

TWO BITS HE DOESN'T
MAKE IT TO THE
BOTTOM OF THE
STAIRS...

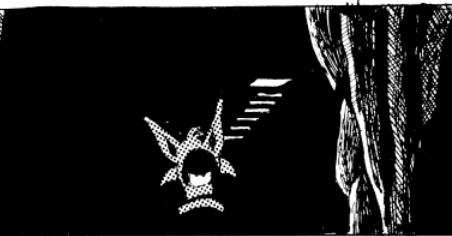
THREE-TO-ONE?
ANY TAKERS?

YOU'RE
COVERED
...

BUT NOT BEFORE BETTING A GOLD COIN AT
TWENTY-TO-ONE ODDS THAT HE WILL
RETURN SAFELY...



EACH SOUND SEEMS
MAGNIFIED OUT OF
ALL PROPORTION...



...AS THE EARTH-PIG STRAINS
TO ANTICIPATE THE ATTACK
OF HIS UNSEEN FOE

THERE IS A SMELL
OF DEATH IN THE
AIR-- SHARP AND
PERSISTENT...



HE HEARS A SOUND FROM
SOMEWHERE TO HIS LEFT...

HE PAUSES...



...AS A FIGURE STEPS
FROM THE SHADOWS
SNARLING...

SOPHIA!
WHAT ARE...?

GEET-A

THE FIRST STROKE, DELIVERED WITH IMMENSE POWER AND PRECISION, ELIMINATES ANY DOUBT OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY...



...RED SOPHIA SIMPLY WASN'T THAT SKILLED...

THE SECOND STROKE DRIVES THE EARTH-PIG BACK A FEW FEET AS HE BEGINS TO PLAN HIS ATTACK...



THE THIRD STROKE CATCHES HIM OFF-BALANCE AND HE BARELY MANAGES TO DELECT IT...



THE FOURTH STROKE MISSES ONLY BY ACCIDENT, AS HE IS CAUGHT WITH HIS SWORD ARM DOWN...

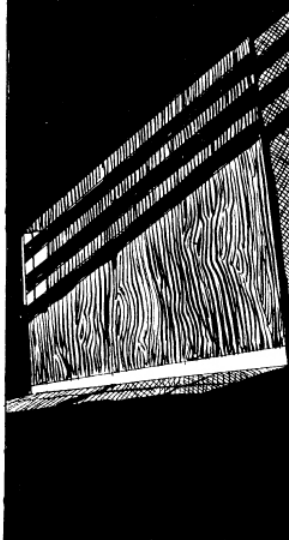


THE FIFTH GRAZES HIS SHOULDER AND, AS HIS FINGERS GO NUMB, THE SWORD CLATTERS TO THE FLOOR...

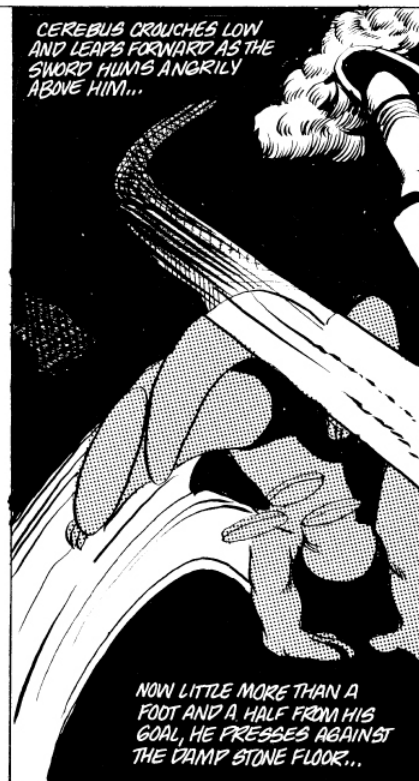


...IT IS THEN THAT HE NOTICES THE DOOR A FEW FEET AWAY...

...AND WONDERS, ABSENTLY, IF HE WILL LIVE TO REACH IT...



CEREBUS CROUCHES LOW AND LEAPS FORWARD AS THE SWORD HUMS ANGRILY ABOVE HIM...



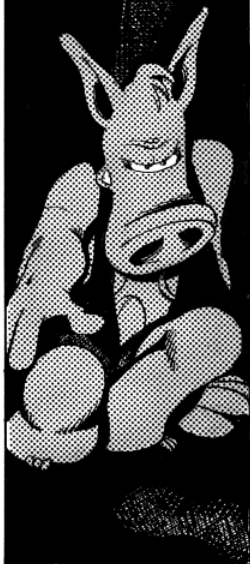
NOW LITTLE MORE THAN A FOOT AND A HALF FROM HIS GOAL, HE PRESSES AGAINST THE DAMP STONE FLOOR...



...AND THE RETURN STROKE MISSES, AS WELL...

RISING TO A CROUCHING POSITION, CEREBUS BEGINS TO REACH FOR HIS FALLEN WEAPON...

AS HE HAD EXPECTED...



...SOPHIA'S LOOK-ALIKE IS THERE BEFORE HIM, SWORD POISED TO ADMINISTER THE DEATH BLOW...

BUT, CEREBUS IS ALREADY SCRAMBLING FOR THE DOOR...



TOO LATE, SHE REALIZES HER MISTAKE! SHE TURNS, ENRAGED, THE SWORD RAISED ONCE MORE...



EVEN AS CEREBUS BURSTS THROUGH THE DOORWAY TO SAFETY...



...PRAYING ALL THE WHILE THAT THERE IS A...



...LOCK ON THIS SIDE OF IT...



CLAK



WELL, WELL, WELL, IF IT ISN'T CEREBUS, THE WORLD-RENNOWNED AARDVARK...

Meanwhile, somewhere in palnu





DON'T JUST STAND THERE GETTING EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED WITH MY POOR...

COME IN! COME IN!

HENROT! * CEREBUS SHOULD HAVE BLESSED...

SO THAT IS RED SOPHIA OUT THERE THEN?

RED SOPHIA? MY GOODNESS-- NO! NO! NO!

* RED SOPHIA'S FATHER. SEE CEREBUS #3 "SONG OF RED SOPHIA"



MOVE ALONG, GRISELDA! YOU'LL HAVE TO FORGIVE THEM...

...WE DON'T GET MUCH COMPANY DOWN HERE...



NO... THAT ISN'T SOPHIA... I HAVEN'T SEEN HER IN OVER A YEAR...

YOU SEE, I MISSED HER TERRIBLY...

NEXT TIME, AIM BETWEEN THE EYES...

I'M GOING TO IGNORE THAT...

I ANGUISHED FOR MONTHS--WHEN SUDDENLY IT OCCURRED TO ME--I WAS A **MAGICIAN**! WHAT WAS TO PREVENT ME FROM MAKING MYSELF A RED SOPHIA? THIS TIME, SHE WOULDN'T JUST BE A DAUGHTER--THIS TIME SHE WOULD BE A **POSSESSION**! THE VERY THOUGHT! NO BACKTALK! NO... "HEY, BEARD-O--HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WAIT 'TIL YOU CROAK--HUH? HOW LONG?"

I COULD ELIMINATE ALL OF THE FLAWS--THE MISTAKES OF NATURE! AND AUGMENT THE **POSITIVE** QUALITIES

YOU WANTED THEM TO HANG TO HER **KNEES**...

PRECISELY...

I MEAN **NO!** DON'T BE SUCH A WISEASS AARDVARK...

...SO I ORDERED MY APPRENTICES AWAY--THIS WAS **BLACK ART** I WAS CONTEMPLATING! I NEEDED EVERY OUNCE OF MAGIC I COULD SUMMON TO CREATE A NEW SOPHIA FROM THE TRACES LEFT IN THIS HER NEW HOME IN TOGETH

SHE WAS A PERFECT DOUBLE, AND THAT WAS THE TOUGH PART--CHANGING ONLY ASPECTS OF HER! THERE WERE PARTS OF HER BRAIN THAT HAD TO BE BUILT FROM SCRATCH

...OBEDIENCE, TIDINESS, THRIFT...

AND SO IT WENT FOR TWO WEEKS UNTIL I HAD COMPLETED IT--A PERFECT VERSION OF SOPHIA

I DECIDED FAIRLY EARLY TO SWITCH TO FINE SILK INSTEAD OF CHAINMAIL

I'M NOT AS PARTIAL TO **SCARTISSUE** AS I ONCE WAS...

I HAD HOPED THAT IT MIGHT IMPROVE HER DISPOSITION A WEE BIT, AS WELL



IT TOOK ONLY A FEW DAYS FOR ME TO REALIZE SHE WAS FAR FROM PERFECT! HER LANGUAGE WAS THE FIRST SIGN-- INSTEAD OF "BEARD-O" IT WAS "OLD TOAD-HUMPER" OR "FOUL DUNG HEAD"--THAT WAS WHEN I NAMED HER **GEET-A**, AN OLD BOREALAN WORD MEANING "SHE-OF-THE-FOUL-MOUTH-AND-DYNAMITE-KNOCKERS"



SHE STARTED COMING HOME LATER AND LATER, SINGING BAWDY BALLADS AND MAKING RUDE NOISES WITH VARIOUS PARTS OF HER **ANATOMY**...THE TOTH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE REVOKED MY "GOOD NEIGHBOR AWARD"...THE MAGICIANS GUILD CANCELLED THEIR FATHER AND DAUGHTER BANQUET BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID WE MIGHT COME...



AFTER HER ALL-NIGHT BINGES, I'D FIND DISTURBING...THINGS IN HER ROOM...

THINGS? WHAT KIND OF THINGS?

SEVERED HEADS, INTERNAL ORGANS, GOLD FILLINGS, RINGS WITH FINGERS STILL IN THEM-- SHE SAID A GIRLFRIEND GAVE THEM TO HER, BUT I WASN'T FOOLED FOR A MINUTE...



IN SHORT SHE WAS EVERYTHING SOPHIA WAS AND MORE-- AND STILL I WASN'T SATISFIED! I MEDITATED UNTIL I CAME UP WITH THE REASON...

WHICH WAS?

I HAD NEVER LIKED **RED SOPHIA** IN THE FIRST PLACE



I COULD SEE ONLY TWO SOLUTIONS...

I COULD SEND HER OUT TO CONQUER THE SEPRAN EMPIRE AND MOVE WHILE SHE WAS GONE...



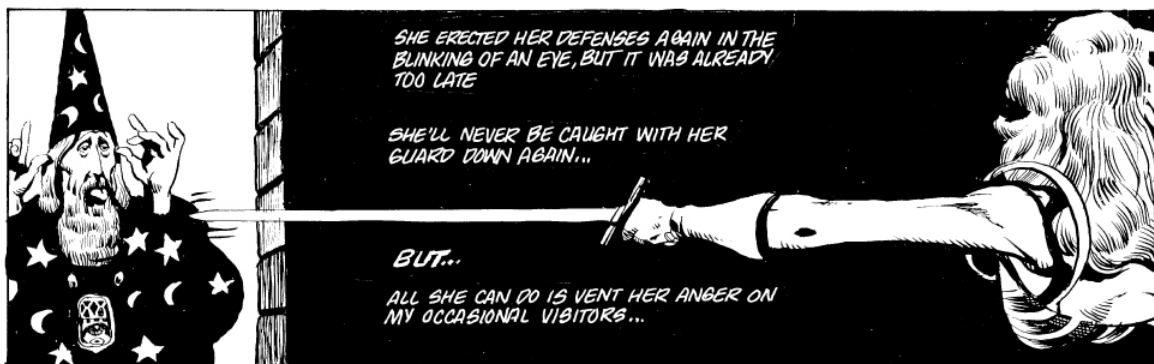
OR YOU COULD MAKE HER YOUR **PERSONAL WATCHDOG**

SHOO!

I WAS AFRAID SHE WOULD DEFEAT THE EMPEROR'S LEGIONS AND RETURN BEFORE I GOT EVERYTHING **PACKED**...



ACTUALLY, IT WAS A VERY SIMPLE PROCESS--I JUST WAITED UNTIL SHE CAME HOME DRUNK AND CONJURED A CHAIN CONNECTING HER LEFT ANKLE TO THE FAR WALL...AS I SUSPECTED SHE HAD LET HER NATURAL IMMUNITY TO SORCERY LAPSE WHILE INEBRIATED..



SHE ERECTED HER DEFENSES AGAIN IN THE BLINKING OF AN EYE, BUT IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE

SHE'LL NEVER BE CAUGHT WITH HER GUARD DOWN AGAIN...

BUT...

ALL SHE CAN DO IS VENT HER ANGER ON MY OCCASIONAL VISITORS...



SHE REALLY IS A WONDERFULLY VICIOUS WATCHDOG, TOO

BUT I GUESS YOU ALREADY FOUND THAT OUT, DIDN'T YOU?

BUT-- THAT MEANS YOU CAN'T LEAVE-- YOU'RE PRACTICALLY HER PRISONER...!



PRISONER?

YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING! SO FAR, SHE'S HACKED UP TWO BILL COLLECTORS, TWO ENCYCLOPEDIA SALES-MEN AND MY EX-WIFE...

THIS IS THE LONGEST PERIOD OF UNINTERRUPTED WORK I'VE MANAGED SINCE I WAS SIXTEEN...

ACTUALLY, THOUGH, IT DOES MEAN THAT YOU'RE A PRISONER...



I'LL TELL YOU WHAT! I'LL JUST WHIP YOU UP A QUICK SLEEPING BAG AND A TOOTHBRUSH...

THANKS ANYWAY...

BUT CEREBUS PLANS TO GET OUT OF HERE WHILE HE STILL HAS SOME HIS SANITY INTACT



ALL THAT
CEREBUS WILL
NEED IS A SHIELD
OF INVISIBILITY

OR FOR YOU TO
PUT GEET-A TO
SLEEP FOR A
FEW MINUTES...



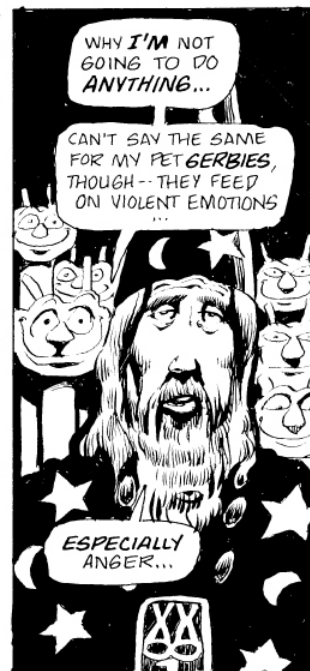
I'M AFRAID GEET-A'S DEFENSES
ARE TOO GOOD... MY MAGIC
CAN'T HELP YOU AT ALL...

OH DEAR, YOU'RE NOT
GETTING ANGRY
ARE YOU? ...



OF COURSE
CEREBUS IS
ANGRY!! WHAT
ARE YOU GOING
TO DO ABOUT
IT?

DO?



WHY I'M NOT
GOING TO DO
ANYTHING...

CAN'T SAY THE SAME
FOR MY PET GERBIES,
THOUGH-- THEY FEED
ON VIOLENT EMOTIONS
...

ESPECIALLY
ANGER...



DON'T
TENSE
UP...

JUST KEEP
RELAXED...
BREATHE IN
AND BREATHE
OUT--
RELAAX...

THIS ISN'T
EASY...

YOU'RE DOING
FINE...

ANOTHER FIVE
MINUTES AND THEY
COULD START TO
LOOSEN THEIR
GRIP...



CEREBUS JUST
HAD A THOUGHT...

IT MUST HAVE
BEEN A GOOD
ONE-- THREE
OF THE GERBIES
JUST LET GO...

THESE GERBIES... THEY'RE
NOT TECHNICALLY MAGICAL
ARE THEY? ...

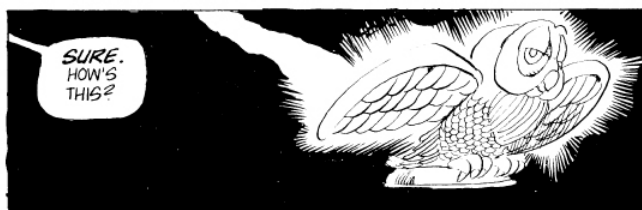
AS I SAID THEY'RE PETS--
MAGICIANS BREED THEM
AS ORGANIC CONTROLS--
THEY KEEP US FROM GETTING
TOO EMOTIONAL...

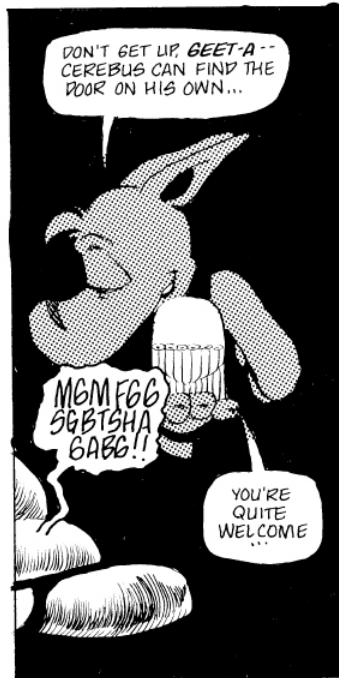
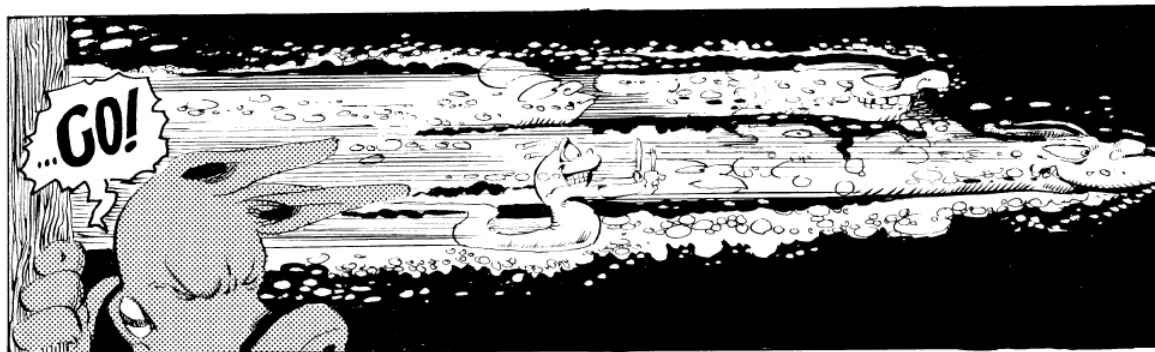
YOU CAN'T AFFORD ANY
FEELINGS TO INTRUDE ON
A DELICATE INCANTATION--
IT UPSETS THINGS TOO
MUCH-- BLEW UP MY FIRST
APPRENTICE THAT WAY...



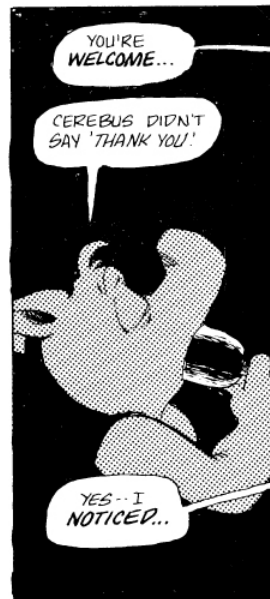
eh-- WOULD YOU MIND JUST
GETTING CRANKY FOR A FEW
MORE MINUTES--? I HAVEN'T
FED THEM LATELY

ACTUALLY, CEREBUS CAN DO
BETTER THAN A FEW MINUTES
OF CRANKINESS...





"GRAUS--CEREBUS IS GOING INSIDE--PICK UP OUR PACKS--COME RIGHT OUT AGAIN...GRAUS STAY HERE AND WAIT FOR CEREBUS."
 "JA, JA, JA. HOW ABOUT ZERBUTZ GIFF GRAUS TWENTY GOLT PIECES ZERBUTZ VIN IN TAFFERN? GRAUS KEEP THEM SAFE FOR ZERBUTZ!" "NO" "NO? VHY NOT?" "BECAUSE CEREBUS IS NOT STUPID," "OH, JA--GRAUS REMEMPER NOW...ZERBUTZ NOT STUPID..."



Cerebus the Aardvark

THE MOTHER TERIM DIRECTS, AND WE, HER PRIESTESSES OBEY. WE SEEK THE DIVINE INSPIRATION WITHIN US AND WE SPREAD THE WORD OUR MOTHER. AS WE LEARN TO FACE TOWARD THE HUB OF THE WHEEL, IT IS INCUMBENT UPON US ALL TO SHOW THE PATH OF REASON, OF LOVE, AND OF OBEDIENCE TO THOSE WHO ARE UNABLE TO PERCEIVE THE SYMMETRY OF MOTHER, CHILD AND THE TRUE PATH. IT IS OUR GOAL NOT ONLY TO FIND OUR OWN ILLUMINATION, BUT TO GIVE ILLUMINATION TO OTHERS. FOR SOME WE NEED ONLY POINT THE WAY. OTHERS WE MUST LEAD. STILL OTHERS WE MUST PUSH. ABOVE ALL, WE CANNOT DISMISS ANY SOUL AS EXTRANEIOUS. ALL ORIGINATE WITH THE MOTHER AND ALL MUST BE INSTRUCTED IN HER WAYS...

CIRIN
THE NEW MATRIARCHY

AND WHEN THE FESTIVAL REACHED ITS CLIMAX, THERE WERE FULLY ELEVEN SCORE AND TEN WITHIN THE TWENTY-THREE CONCENTRIC RINGS OF THE GREAT HALL. THE MUSIC REACHED A FEVER PITCH AND, AS LORD PIG, I WAS DIRECTED TO THROW OUT THE FIRST VIRGIN; SHE WAS FOLLOWED BY TWENTY-TWO MORE AND ALL WERE ENGULFED IN SECONDS. THE GREAT FIRES WERE STOKED AND THE CHANTING SHIFTED IN MOOD AND TEMPO AND A GREAT HAZE OF BLUISH-PURPLE SMOKE SEEMED TO RISE FROM THE INNERMOST RING, TAKING THE SHAPE OF A DEMON WHO BECKONED TO ME. AN EYE GREW IN THE MIDDLE OF ITS FOREHEAD, AND SPLIT, SENDING SHOWERS OF LIGHT IN ALL DIRECTIONS WHICH BLINDED THE SWAYING MASS OF HUMANITY AT ITS FEET.

THE NEXT DAY, I PLACED AN ORDER FOR TWENTY BALES OF THE SWEET-SMELLING FLOWERTOPS AND TWENTY-ONE SACKS OF SEEDS.

INNEC STARVM
MY MONTHS AS PALNU'S GRANDLORD

HE SEEMS TO
BE AWAKENING,
MOTHER WENDA

YOU MUST BE READY TO
READ THE CARDS, PERCE
HIS AWARENESS HAS
BEEN HEIGHTENED
BY THE DRUG...

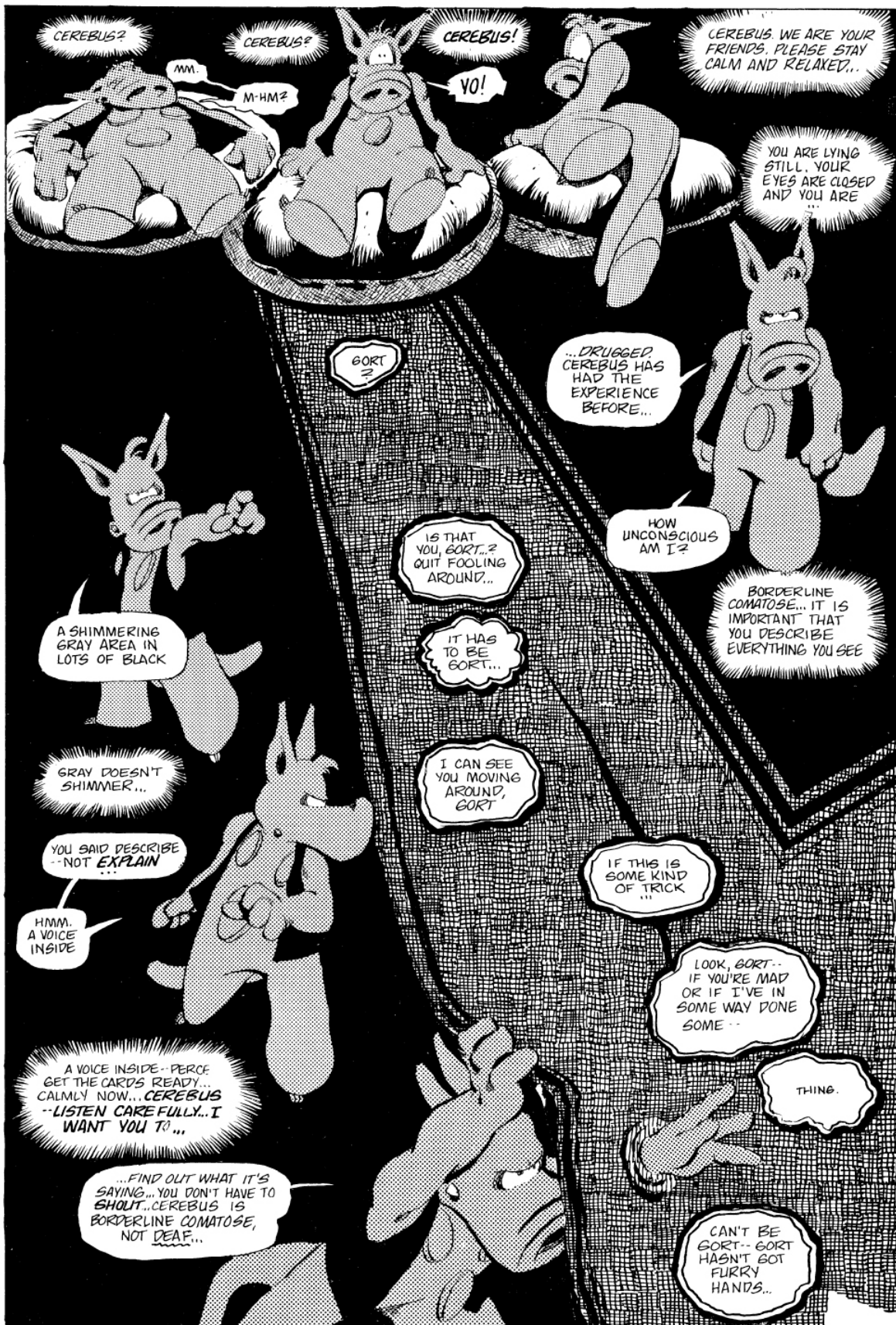
BUT HIS PERCEPTIONS
ARE VERY LIKELY TO
BE SYMBOLIC IN
NATURE...

I
UNDERSTAND...

PRAISE THE
HOLY MOTHER
AND HER GREAT
WORKS...

AND LET US PRAY THAT
YOU HAVE FOUND AN ALLY
FOR OUR CAUSE, PERCE...

IT WOULD BE A PITY TO
HAVE TO DESTROY SO
UNIQUE A CREATURE...





CEREBUS?

CEREBUS?

HOW ODD.
HE SEEMS TO
HAVE LAPSED
INTO A VERY
DEEP SLEEP.

THE PRIEST OF CUPS
AND THE PRIESTESS OF
SWORDS ARE IN OPPOSITION,
MOTHER WENDA...

GO
ON...

IT WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT
CEREBUS IS A RANDOM FACTOR
WITH IMMENSE AND DISRUPTIVE
CAPABILITIES...

OR ELSE HE'S A SMALL
EVERGREEN PLANT WITH
PURPLE FLOWERS...

I THOUGHT
GORT AND
I WERE THE
ONLY TWO
IN TOGETH
WHO COULD
REACH THE
SEVENTH
SPHERE...

CEREBUS?

YOU DON'T SUPPOSE
SOMETHING HAS
GONE WRONG, DO
YOU?

IS HE SUPPOSED TO
uh... STOP BREATHING
LIKE THAT?

I'M NOT SURE...
I'VE NEVER USED
THE DRUG ON
SOMEONE
BEFORE...

CEREBUS
HASN'T BEEN
MEDITATING

CEREBUS
HAS BEEN
DRUGGED

REALLY?

SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS
DRUG PEOPLE. MAYHAP IT'S
SOMEONE I KNOW?

HE CERTAINLY
DOESN'T LOOK
HEALTHY
DOES HE?

NO, HE
DOESN'T
...

ONE IS CALLED
PERCE...THE OTHER
IS WENDA...

OH-OH! CIRINISTS! INNER CIRCLE,
TOO! YOU'RE LUCKY ALL THEY DID
WAS DRUG YOU... WHAT DO THEY
WANT?

THEY SAID SOMETHING ABOUT
WANTING TO KNOW CEREBUS'
ROLE IN THE LARGER
SCHEME OF THINGS...

DO YOU
HAVE
ONE?

NOT THAT CEREBUS
KNOWS OF...

HMM. THEY'RE QUITE LIKELY
TO KILL YOU, THEN. LET ME
SEE IF I CAN FIND SOME
THING IN CIRIN'S BOOKS
THAT WILL HELP YOU...

YOU NEED TO MAKE THEM
BELIEVE YOU ARE TOO
VALUABLE FOR THEM
TO ELIMINATE...

DON'T GO
AWAY
NOW...

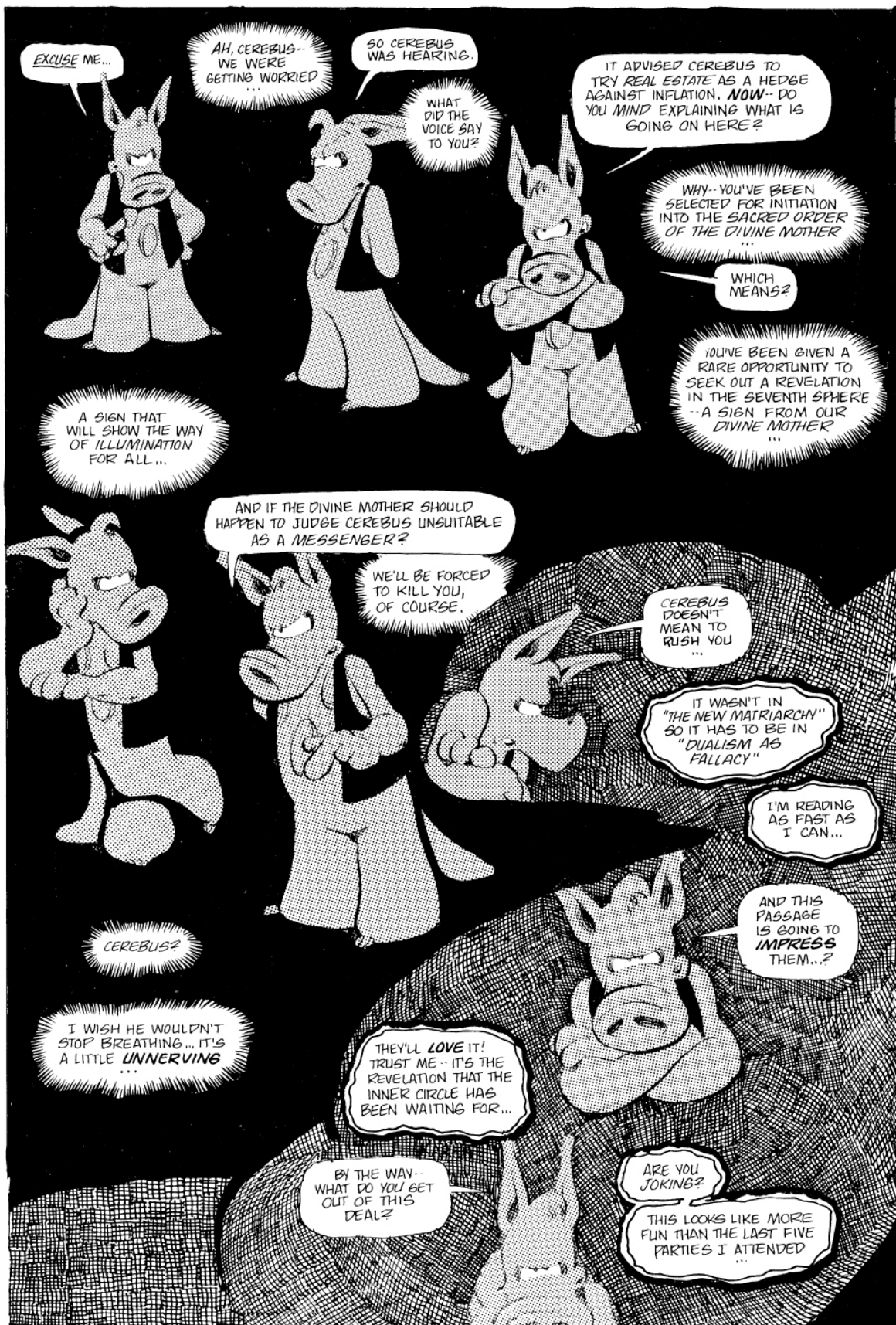
TSK.

THAT'S A
SHAME. WHAT
DO YOU THINK
WE OUGHT TO
DO WITH THE
BODY?

I SHOULD THINK
WE COULD GET
SOME MONEY
FOR IT

HMM,
AYE...

UNHE



EXCUSE ME...

AH, CEREBUS--
WE WERE
GETTING WORRIED
...

SO CEREBUS
WAS HEARING.

WHAT
DID THE
VOICE SAY
TO YOU?

IT ADVISED CEREBUS TO
TRY REAL ESTATE AS A HEDGE
AGAINST INFLATION. *NOW--* DO
YOU MIND EXPLAINING WHAT IS
GOING ON HERE?

WHY-- YOU'VE BEEN
SELECTED FOR INITIATION
INTO THE SACRED ORDER
OF THE DIVINE MOTHER
...

WHICH
MEANS?

YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN A
RARE OPPORTUNITY TO
SEEK OUT A REVELATION
IN THE SEVENTH SPHERE
--A SIGN FROM OUR
DIVINE MOTHER
...

A SIGN THAT
WILL SHOW THE WAY
OF ILLUMINATION
FOR ALL...

AND IF THE DIVINE MOTHER SHOULD
HAPPEN TO JUDGE CEREBUS UNSUITABLE
AS A MESSENGER?

WE'LL BE FORCED
TO KILL YOU,
OF COURSE.

CEREBUS
DOESN'T
MEAN TO
RUSH YOU
...

IT WASN'T IN
"THE NEW MATRIARCHY"
SO IT HAS TO BE IN
"DUALISM AS
FALLACY"

I'M READING
AS FAST AS
I CAN...

AND THIS
PASSAGE
IS GOING TO
IMPRESS
THEM...?

CEREBUS?

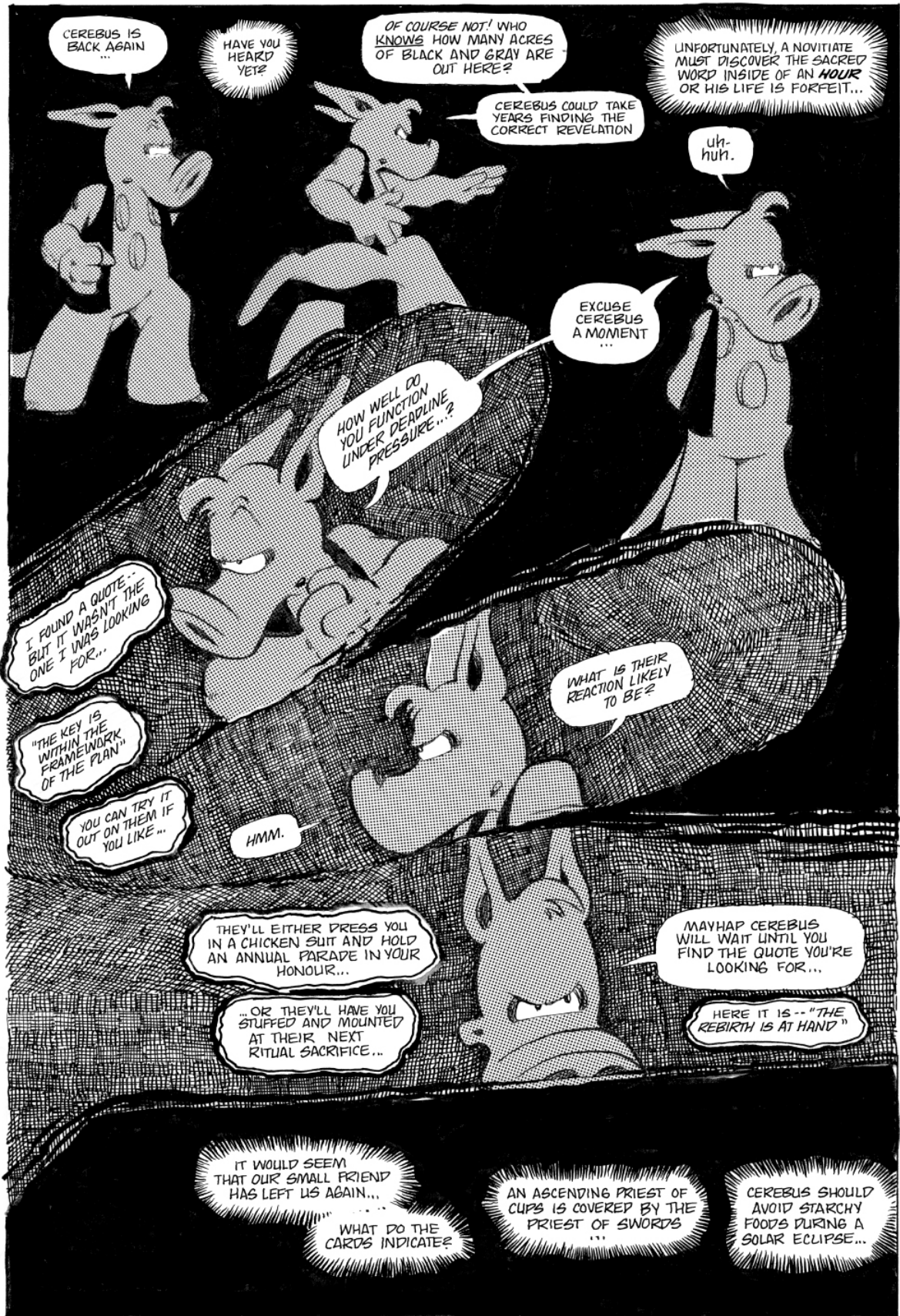
I WISH HE WOULDN'T
STOP BREATHING... IT'S
A LITTLE *UNNERVING*
...

THEY'LL LOVE IT!
TRUST ME... IT'S THE
REVELATION THAT THE
INNER CIRCLE HAS
BEEN WAITING FOR...

BY THE WAY--
WHAT DO YOU GET
OUT OF THIS
DEAL?

ARE YOU
JOKING?

THIS LOOKS LIKE MORE
FUN THAN THE LAST FIVE
PARTIES I ATTENDED
...



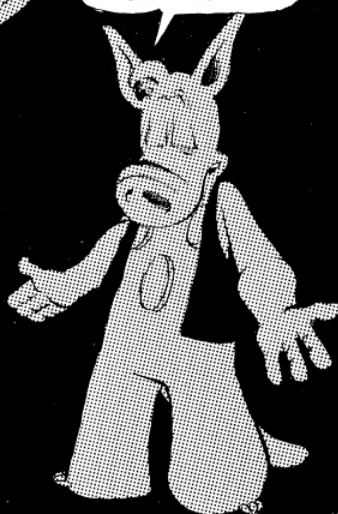
CEREBUS HAS HEARD THE
VOICE OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

THE REBIRTH... IS
...AT HAND...!



MOTHER OF US ALL--
ARE YOU CERTAIN?

CEREBUS CAN ONLY
TELL YOU WHAT HE
HEARD WITH HIS VERY
OWN EARS...



IF THIS IS TRUE, THEN
OUR YEARS OF WAITING
ARE OVER AT LAST!

CEREBUS CLAIMS NO REWARD-- TO
SERVE AS NAUGHT BUT A HUMBLE VESSEL
TRULY-- TO KNOW HE IS A FAVOURED
CHILD OF THE ALL-KNOWING MOTHER
IS REWARD ENOW FOR AN EARTH-PIG
BORN!



PERCE--ALERT
THE CONVENT AT
WINTER'S GATE
THAT WE WILL NEED
QUARTERS FOR
CEREBUS...

TO GO HIS OWN WAY
AND SO TO WORSHIP OUR
MOST MERCIFUL MOTHER
IN EACH WAKING MO...

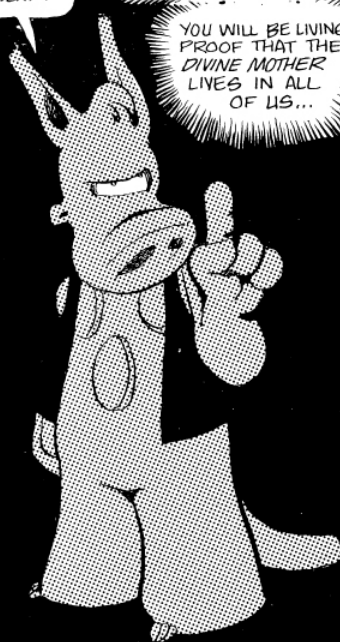
...MENT.



uh-- DID
YOU SAY,
'CONVENT'?

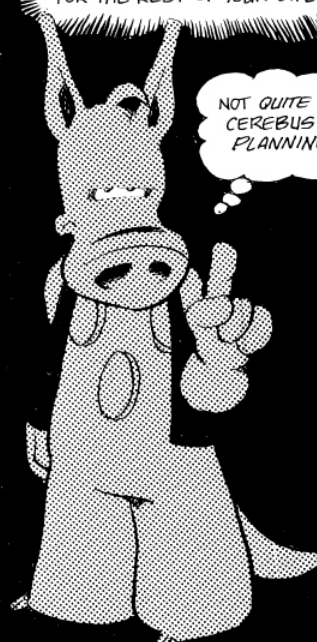
AYE-- THE START OF
A NEW AND BRIGHTER
AGE! PILGRIMS WILL
FLOCK TO SEE YOU...

YOU WILL BE LIVING
PROOF THAT THE
DIVINE MOTHER
LIVES IN ALL
OF US...



WE HAVE STOREHOUSES OF
MANY EXOTIC STIMULANTS--
ENOUGH TO KEEP YOU IN THIS
STATE OF HEIGHTENED AWARENESS
FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE...

NOT QUITE WHAT
CEREBUS WAS
PLANNING...



FOR NOW AND FOREVERMORE YOU SHALL BE ADMINISTERED
TO EVERY SECOND OF THE DAY! AS A REVERED CHILD OF
THE LIVING TERIM, YOU WILL BE SHELTERED FROM THE
BASE, MATERIAL OUTSIDE WORLD. BEFORE THE YEAR
IS OUT, A TEMPLE SHALL BE RAISED-- A PLACE OF
WORSHIP WHERE ALL THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF
OUR MOST HOLY MOTHER MAY KISS YOUR FEET AND
KNOW THE LIGHT OF DIVINE BRILLIANCE THAT GLOWS
WITHIN YOU...



CEREBUS WOULD
HAVE BEEN BETTER
OFF STUFFED AND
MOUNTED...

WHAT AN **EXCITING**
LIFE YOU WILL HAVE
--A LIFE OF PURPOSE
AND WORTH

CEREBUS?

THEY WANT TO LOCK
CEREBUS AWAY IN
A CONVENT...

DON'T KNOCK IT,
STEADY
EMPLOYMENT
IS HARD TO
COME BY IN THIS
DAY AND AGE
...

YOU **KNEW**
THIS WAS GOING TO
HAPPEN?

SAY, FELLA--I JUST
SAVED YOUR LIFE...

WHATEVER BECAME
OF OLD-FASHIONED
GRATITUDE?

GRATITUDE?

YOU GET CEREBUS
LOCKED AWAY IN
A CONVENT TO
SPEND THE REST
OF HIS LIFE IN
A STATE CLOSELY
RESEMBLING
A COMA...

WHILE A BUNCH OF
RELIGIOUS FANATICS
DERIVE ORAL
GRATIFICATION
FROM HIS FEET...

...AND YOU EXPECT **GRATITUDE?**

WELL IT'S NOT AS IF I DON'T
HAVE ANYTHING **BETTER** TO
DO. I HAVE MY OWN QUASI-
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT TO
WORRY ABOUT...

CEREBUS
DOESN'T...


uh-- YOUR
OWN
MOVEMENT?

I THOUGHT YOU'D RECOGNIZE
ME-- I'M **SUENTEUS PO...**

FOUNDER OF
ILLUSIONISM...?

CEREBUS
THOUGHT YOU
WERE DEAD..

QUITE **UNDERSTANDABLE**.
MOST PEOPLE ONE HUNDRED
AND EIGHTY TWO YEARS OLD
ARE DEAD..



AS I WAS SAYING, I DON'T EXPECT A TESTIMONIAL FOR SAVING YOUR LIFE, BUT I SHOULD THINK YOU COULD AT THE LEAST...

ILLUSIONIST, EH? MAYHAP CEREBUS CAN YET ESCAPE THE IGNO-MINIOUS FATE WHICH AWAITS HIM

IF YOU ARE TRULY *SUENTEUS* FD, THEN I HAVE NEWS OF CIRINIST PLANS WHICH MAY BE *USEFUL*...

PLANS? THE CIRINISTS HAVE *PLANS*? I THOUGHT THEIR ONLY GOAL WAS TO WIPE OUT *FD* IN OUR LIFETIME...

THEY ARE NEARBY...IT IS DANGEROUS TO SPEAK RIGHT NOW... *CEREBUS* WILL RETURN WHEN HE *CAN*...

DANGEROUS TO...?
DANGEROUS? YOU
MEAN CIRINISTS
ARE SOMEHOW
DANGEROUS, TOO?

THEY
COME...

IF CEREBUS DOES
NOT RETURN, TAKE
CARE! THERE IS
GREAT DANGER

WAIT A MINUTE!
IS THIS SOME KIND
OF JOKE?

WENDA! CEREBUS
HAS RETURNED!
THERE IS GREAT
DANGER PRESENT

DANGER?
WHAT MANNER
OF DANGER?

ILLUSIONIST
VILLAIN! HE DARES
TO PROFANE THE
HOLY CEREBUS
!?

CEREBUS WAS JUST
NOW OVERCOME BY
SUVENTEUS PD!

HE SEIZED CEREBUS'
MIND IN A GRIP LIKE
IRON CHAINS!

BLASPHEMY!
DESECRATION!
SACRILEGE!

HE SAID I SHOULD CAST MY LOT WITH
THE ILLUSIONISTS! HE KEPT MAKING
RUDE REMARKS ABOUT THE ALL-GIVING
MOTHER AND CERTAIN OF HER BODILY
ORIFICES...

YAAAGH!!

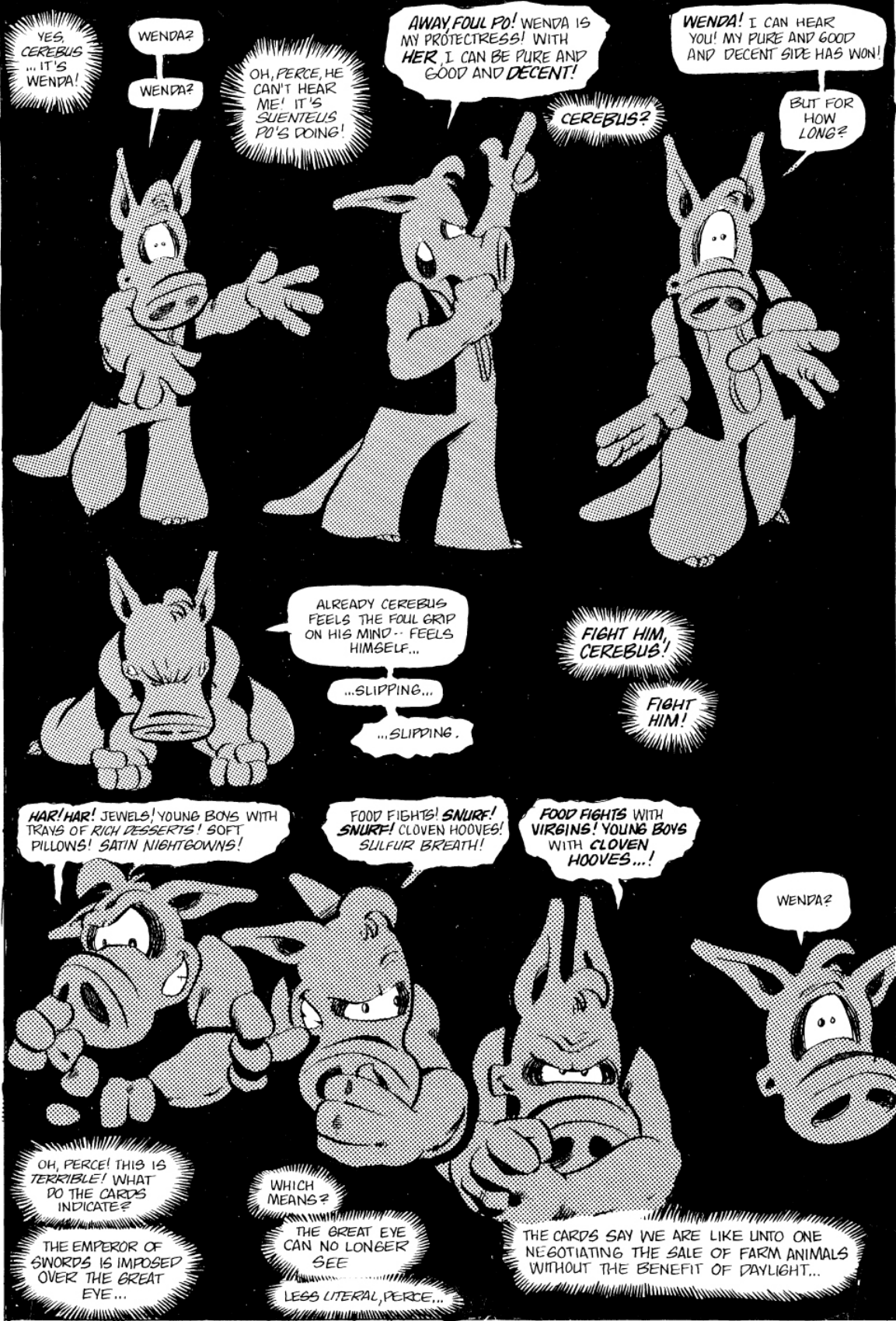
CEREBUS DOESN'T KNOW
HOW MUCH LONGER HE CAN
RESIST... TOO... STRONG... FOR
....

TOO STRONG..FOR... uh... SNORT! SNURF! VIRGINS,
PD! CEREBUS WANTS MORE VIRGINS! AND
WINE! CEREBUS WANTS TO BE DROWNED
IN WINE WITH A HUNDRED VIRGINS ...!!

NO, CEREBUS!
FIGHT HIM--
OH, PLEASE
FIGHT HIM!

CEREBUS?

WENDA?
IS THAT
YOU?



YES, CEREBUS ... IT'S WENDA!

WENDA?
WENDA?

OH, PERCE, HE CAN'T HEAR ME! IT'S SQUENTELUS PO'S DOING!

AWAY FOUL PO! WENDA IS MY PROTECTRESS! WITH HER I CAN BE PURE AND GOOD AND DECENT!

CEREBUS?

WENDA! I CAN HEAR YOU! MY PURE AND GOOD AND DECENT SIDE HAS WON!

BUT FOR HOW LONG?



ALREADY CEREBUS FEELS THE FOUL GRIP ON HIS MIND-- FEELS HIMSELF...
...SLIPPING...
...SLIPPING.

FIGHT HIM, CEREBUS!

FIGHT HIM!

HAR! HAR! JEWELS! YOUNG BOYS WITH TRAYS OF RICH DESSERTS! SOFT PILLOWS! SATIN NIGHTGOWNS!

FOOD FIGHTS! SNURF! SNURF! CLOVEN HOOVES! SULFUR BREATH!

FOOD FIGHTS WITH VIRGINS! YOUNG BOYS WITH CLOVEN HOOVES...!



OH, PERCE! THIS IS TERRIBLE! WHAT DO THE CARDS INDICATE?

WHICH MEANS?

THE EMPEROR OF SWORDS IS IMPOSED OVER THE GREAT EYE...

THE GREAT EYE CAN NO LONGER SEE
...LESS LITERAL, PERCE...

THE CARDS SAY WE ARE LIKE UNTO ONE NEGOTIATING THE SALE OF FARM ANIMALS WITHOUT THE BENEFIT OF DAYLIGHT...

YOU MUST
LISTEN CAREFULLY, WENDA!
CEREBUS HASN'T MUCH
TIME...

I'M
LISTENING
...

THERE IS SOME
SINISTER ILLUSIONIST
PLOT AFOOT...THEIR
MOST INFLUENTIAL
MEMBERS ARE ALL
GATHERED IN
THE SEVENTH
SPHERE...

CEREBUS' LOYALTY
LIES WITH THE ALL-
KNOWING MOTHER!
IT IS FOR THIS REASON
THAT CEREBUS IS
WILLING TO RISK
ALL TO DISCOVER
THEIR PLAN...

ONCE CEREBUS
ENTERS THE
FIELD OF THEIR
INFLUENCE
HE IS LIKELY
TO BE **OVER-
WHELMED** BY
SELF-INDULGENCE

THE ILLUSIONISTS
ARE MASTERS
OF HEDONISM --
ONE FALSE STEP
AND CEREBUS
COULD BE HAVING
TOO MUCH **FUN**
TO RESIST...!

IN
SHORT...

THIS MAY BE THE
LAST TIME THAT
YOU SEE CEREBUS
AS HE IS NOW...

GRIM...
REVERENT
...

...RESPONSIBLE...

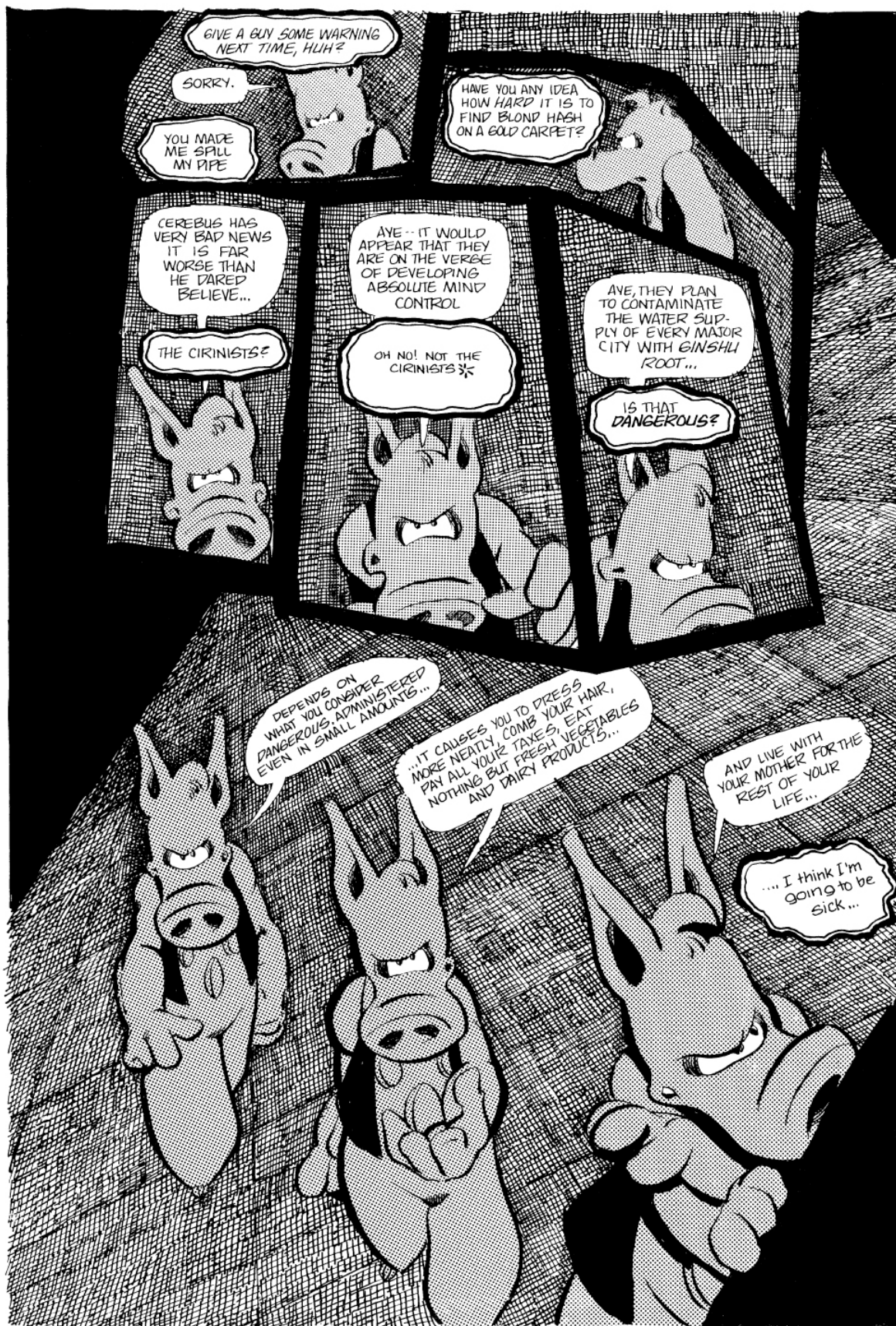
CEREBUS IS NOW GOING
TO PERMIT HIMSELF
TO SINK TO THE VERY
DEPTHS OF DEPRAVITY...
TO EXPERIENCE FAITH-
SAPPING PLEASURE
AND **DECADENCE...** IT
IS WITH SOMBER VISAGE
THAT CEREBUS GOES...

THE HOLY MOTHER
WILLING, THAT
GRIMNESS WILL
SEE CEREBUS
THROUGH...

PRAY FOR
CEREBUS,
WENDA...

I WILL,
CEREBUS...
YOU KNOW
I WILL!

PO?!



GIVE A GUY SOME WARNING
NEXT TIME, HUH?

SORRY.

YOU MADE
ME SPILL
MY PIPE

HAVE YOU ANY IDEA
HOW HARD IT IS TO
FIND BLOND HASH
ON A GOLD CARPET?

CEREBUS HAS
VERY BAD NEWS
IT IS FAR
WORSE THAN
HE DARED
BELIEVE...

THE CIRINISTS?

AYE -- IT WOULD
APPEAR THAT THEY
ARE ON THE VERGE
OF DEVELOPING
ABSOLUTE MIND
CONTROL

OH NO! NOT THE
CIRINISTS?!

AYE, THEY PLAN
TO CONTAMINATE
THE WATER SUP-
PLY OF EVERY MAJOR
CITY WITH GINSHU
ROOT...

IS THAT
DANGEROUS?

DEPENDS ON
WHAT YOU CONSIDER
DANGEROUS. ADMINISTERED
EVEN IN SMALL AMOUNTS...

...IT CAUSES YOU TO DRESS
MORE NEATLY, COMB YOUR HAIR,
PAY ALL YOUR TAXES, EAT
NOTHING BUT FRESH VEGETABLES
AND DAIRY PRODUCTS...

AND LIVE WITH
YOUR MOTHER FOR THE
REST OF YOUR
LIFE...

.... I think I'm
going to be
sick...

WENDA! THE
ILLUSIONISTS!
THEY-- THEY'RE
GOING TO...
...TO...

IF THEY DISCOVER CEREBUS
IS COMING TO TALK TO YOU, CEREBUS
IS AS GOOD AS DEAD... THEY MAY
BE ON MY TRAIL EVEN AS...

THE INFORMATION! I HAVE
TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS
ROOT-- IF NOT IT MIGHT BE
MILK AND COOKIES FOR ALL
OF US...

QUICKLY, THEN! YOU KNOW
THE FABRIC STORE NEAR
EAST WOLF'SGATE?

AYE-- BUT
WHAT
ABOUT
...

WHAT?
WHAT?

WHAT?!

FIVE POUNDS DISSOLVED IN WATER IS
ENOUGH TO SAP THE WILL OF EVERY
MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD BETWEEN
HERE AND BOREALA...

GREAT ASTRAL
METAPHYSICS!
SOMETHING HAS
TO BE DONE
...

FIVE POUNDS OF GINSHU
EXTRACT ARE CONCEALED
IN THE BOLTS OF CLOTH
IN THE WINDOW...

FIVE POUNDS!
BUT-- WE NEED TO STOP
THEM COMPLETELY...

NO!
NO!
NO!

WHAT?
WHAT?
WHAT?

AYE-- SOMETHING DOES HAVE
TO BE DONE... ALL THE BOLTS OF
CLOTH IN THAT WINDOW MUST BE
BURNED! AND FURTHER-- IT MUST
BE DONE WITHIN THE HOUR-- OR
IT WILL BE TOO LATE!

I MUST SEND OUT
AN ALARM-- GET
HELP...

YOU WILL WAIT FOR
CEREBUS' SIGNAL-- I'LL
TELL YOU WHEN THE CIRINISTS
LEAVE THE SHOP UNGUARDED

WHEN CEREBUS GIVES
YOU THE SIGNAL, YOUR
FOLLOWERS ARE TO
BREAK THE WINDOW ...

WENPA! CEREBUS HAS
MANAGED TO ESCAPE
THEIR CLUTCHES...THEY
PLAN A HORRIBLE FATE
FOR TOGITH!

OH-
NO!

IF THEY HAVE THEIR WAY, INSIDE
OF A FORTNIGHT, TOGITH WILL
BE STRIPPED OF ITS CIVILIZED
VENEER-- REDUCED TO A STATE OF
BARBARISM BARELY A STEP
REMOVED FROM THE BEASTS
OF THE FIELD...

BUT, I THOUGHT
MEN WERE
ALREADY
RUNNING
TOGITH...

THEN DRAG
ALL THE CLOTH
INTO THE STREET ...

AND **BURN** IT--BE
VERY CAREFUL TO NOT
INHALE--EVEN THE SMALLEST
PARTICLE OF GINSHU COULD
TURN YOU INTO AN UP-
STANDING CITIZEN...

NO! NO! IT'S MUCH WORSE
THAN THAT--IT'S A PLOT
TO BRING A NEW DARK
AGE UPON THE CITY!

BUT
HOW?

CLOTHING!
THEY'RE
GOING TO
DESTROY
CLOTHING!

AN OPEN
SPACE WILL
MINIMIZE
THE RISK...

...SO BE SURE
YOU BURN THE
CLOTH IN THE
STREET AND NOT
IN THE WINDOW ...

ARE YOU
GETTING
ALL THIS,
PO?

WHAT'S THAT?
I'M SORRY
I WASN'T
LISTENING ...

DO CEREBUS A FAVOUR
AND PUT THE PIPE
AWAY UNTIL THE JOB
IS DONE, OKAY?

THAT'S HORRIBLE!
WE MUST TAKE
ACTION BEFORE
IT'S...

... CLOTHING?!

I DON'T
GET IT.

JUST GET YOUR
FOLLOWERS INTO
POSITION AND
TELL THEM TO
BURN THE CLOTH
IN THE **STREET** ...

OH YEAH! **FUMES**
OR SOMETHING
RIGHT? I'LL GET
THEM THERE--
DON'T WORRY ...

WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING WITHOUT HIS **CLOTHES**? LITTLE MORE THAN AN **ANIMAL**! AND THAT'S THE WAY THE **ILLUSIONISTS** WANT EVERYONE TO BE ...

Ah--I BEGIN TO SEE!

IT'S A TWO-STAGE PLAN. FIRST, THEY DESTROY ALL THE RAW MATERIALS BY BURNING CLOTH, WRECKING LOOMS, SNAPPING NEEDLES, TANGLING THREAD, LAYING SIEGE TO LARGE TEXTILE MILLS, ASSASSINATING SHEEP...

HOW **GHASTLY**!

AND THAT'S ONLY THE BEGINNING! ONCE THEY'VE MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO **REPLACE** YOUR CLOTHING, THEN THE SQUADS OF WARDROBE MARAUDERS GO TO WORK -- BREAKING INTO HOMES AND PUTTING EVERY LAST BUTTON AND BOOTLACE TO THE TORCH...

MAY THE HOLY MOTHER HAVE MERCY ON US ...

BEFORE LONG, THEY'LL BE SWARMING INTO THE STREETS, RIPPING THE CLOTHES OFF OF **PASSERS-BY** AND THROWING EVERY STITCH ONTO HUGE BONFIRES! NO ONE -- **NO ONE** -- WILL BE SAFE!!

THEY MUST BE STOPPED! BY THE SACRED BOOKS OF CIRIN -- **THEY MUST BE STOPPED!**

THEIR FIRST TARGET
IS GOING TO BE THE
FABRIC STORE NEAR
EAST WOLF'S GATE

BUT-- THAT'S
JUST ACROSS
THE STREET
FROM HERE!

REALLY?!

WHAT AN
AMAZING
COINCIDENCE
...

I DON'T SEE
ANYTHING, THO...

KEEP WATCHING--
THEY SHOULD BE
THERE...

ARE YOUR
FORCES IN
POSITION,
PO2

AYE! OH--AND
GOOD NEWS
--ALMOST HALF
OF THEM ARE
SOBER...

GIVE THE
SIGNAL TO
ATTACK...

RIGHT ABOUT
NOW...

YOU'RE RIGHT!
THEY'RE BREAKING
THE WINDOW,
DRAGGING BOLTS
OF CLOTH INTO
THE STREET!
...

PERCE-- QUICKLY!
ALERT ALL OF OUR
SISTERS-- OPEN
WARFARE WITH
THE ILLUSIONISTS!
GO!

WHY--NO! THEY'RE
JUST STANDING
AROUND LOOKING
AT IT...

ONE GONE--
ONE MORE TO
GET RID
OF...

ARE THEY
BURNING
THE CLOTH?

CLOVIS'
LOBOTOMY
SCAR...

NOW
WHAT?

OH, WOW-- THEY FORGOT
THE TORCH-- I TOLD
YOU GUYS-- I SAID
"REMEMBER TO BRING
THE TORCH..."

SAY, CEREBUS-- IS IT
OKAY IF THEY JUST RIP
THE CLOTH TO SHREDS?
...

NO... WAIT... IT'S OKAY...
SHEA BROUGHT A BOX
OF MATCHES...

GOOD MAN, SHEA-- FIVE
MORE LIKE YOU AND WE
COULD TAKE OVER THE
WORLD...

WENDA...

THERE ARE ALMOST
TWO DOZEN ILLUSIONISTS
OUT THERE WREAKING
HAVOC...

ARE YOU SURE
YOUR SISTERS
WILL BE ABLE
TO HANDLE
THEM?

OH OF COURSE, I JUST
WISH THEY WERE STURDIER
ENEMIES -- LIKE THE
HARD-LINE
TARIMITES...

ILLUSIONISTS TEND
TO BLOW OVER IN
A STIFF WIND
...

THAT'S WHAT SURPRISES
ME-- THE ILLUSIONISTS ARE
HARDLY EQUIPPED FOR A
MULTI-LEVEL REVOLUTION!
I WONDER HOW PO MANAGED
TO CONVINCE THEM THEY
WERE?

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW
EASY SOME GROUPS ARE TO
MANIPULATE...

WHAT?

NOTHING.

CEREBUS
WAS JUST
THINKING
OUT
LOUD

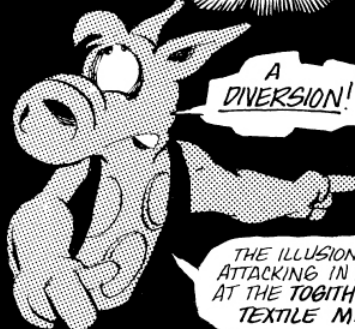
AS I EXPECTED... NO
RESISTANCE AT ALL
TO OUR ATTACK...



WENDA!

I JUST HEARD PO'S VOICE!
--THE FABRIC SHOP IS ONLY
A DIVERSION...

A WHAT?



A
DIVERSION!

THE ILLUSIONISTS ARE
ATTACKING IN FULL FORCE
AT THE TOGITH-WESTERN
TEXTILE MILL...

I MUST LEAD OUR
FORCES THERE,
THEN!

TWO DOWN
CEREBUS IS
HOME FREE

YES, WENDA! YOU MUST
LEAD YOUR TROOPS FOR
THE GREATER GLORY
OF OUR SACRED...

WOMEN ARE ATTACKING
YOU? REALLY? WHAT
ARE YOU COMPLAINING
ABOUT?

OH, I SEE CLUBS
AND PIPES AND
THINGS?

HMM.

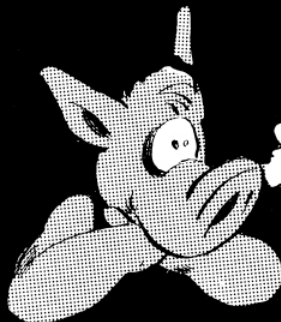
DID THEY SAY WHAT
THEY WERE **ANGRY**
ABOUT?

NOT EVEN A
HINT, EH?

WELL, I GUESS THEY JUST WANT
A FIGHT-- AND IF THEY WANT A
FIGHT-- WE'LL GIVE THEM
A FIGHT...

HOW ARE WE **DOING**
IN THE FIGHT, BY
THE WAY?

ASIDE FROM SHEA
SETTING FIRE TO A
COUPLE OF THEM, HOW
ARE WE DOING?



GULP

UH-HUH.....UH-HUH....
UH-HUH..... - SOUNDS
LIKE IT'S TIME FOR
A STRATEGIC RETREAT

HMM.
TRIED THAT
ALREADY
DID YOU...?

SO WHICH
ALTERNATE
PLAN **ARE**
YOU USING?

"WHINING AND
BEGGING FOR
MERCY." I
SEE.

I'M AFRAID MY
LADS ARE IN A
BIT OF TROUBLE,
CEREBUS...

NOT THAT THEY CAN'T
HANDLE A MASS OF
FRAGILE WOMEN...

IT'S JUST...

D-DID YOU JUST
DROP SOMETHING
DOWN- CEREBUS'
THROAT?...

OH, AVE!-- JUST IN CASE
YOU HAD ANY PLANS TO
LEAVE WHILE I'M GONE

IT'S A SLEEPING POTION--
IT TAKES EFFECT IN
SECONDS... SEE YOU IN
A FEW HOURS...

WENDA! WAIT!!
CEREBUS HAS
TO...T...
D
E
X
F
P
R
L



CEREBUS?

CEREBUS?



Cerebus the Aardvark

IN POINT OF FACT, IT DIDN'T
LOOK LIKE TOBITH AT ALL! ...
SOMEHOW HE HAD BEEN MOVED
FURTHER NORTH...

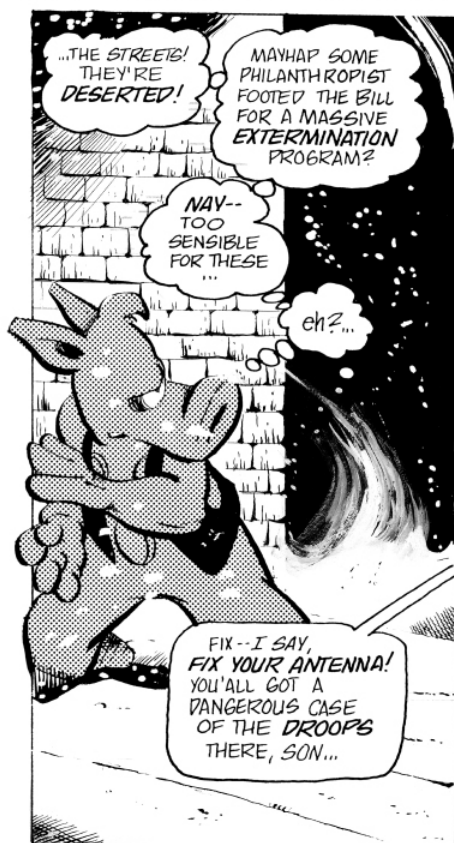
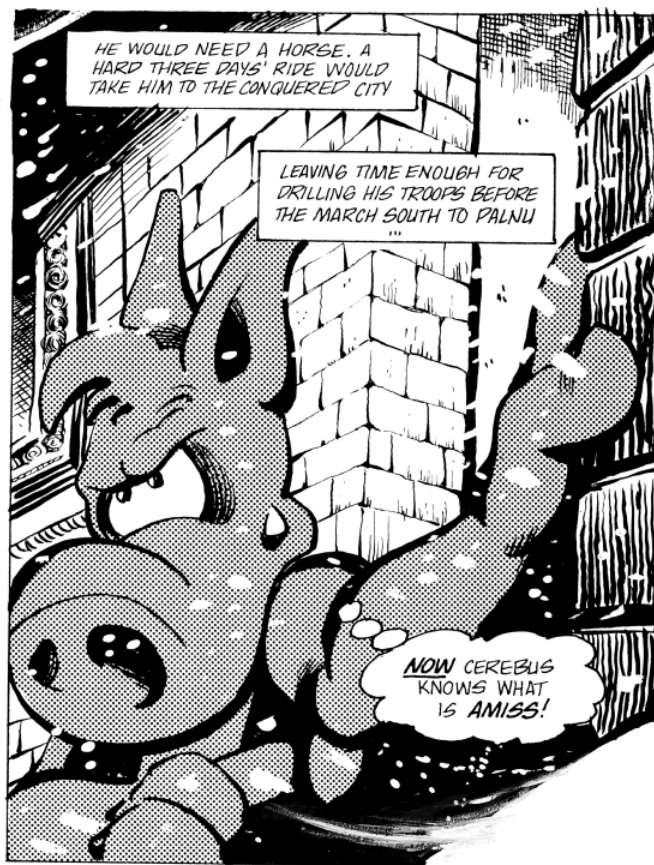
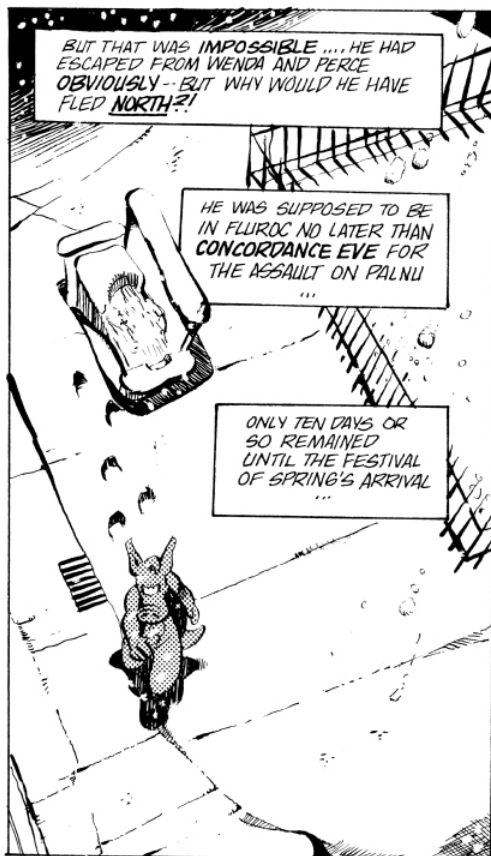
SOMEHOW, HE WAS NO LONGER IN EVEN
THE GENERAL VICINITY OF PERCE, WENDA
OR SVENTUS PO...

THE EARTH-PIG CONTINUES TO STARE AT HIS
SURROUNDINGS, GRADUALLY PIECING TOGETHER
ALL THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE, UNTIL, AT LAST...

HE IS CERTAIN OF HIS
NEW LOCATION...

BEDUIN?

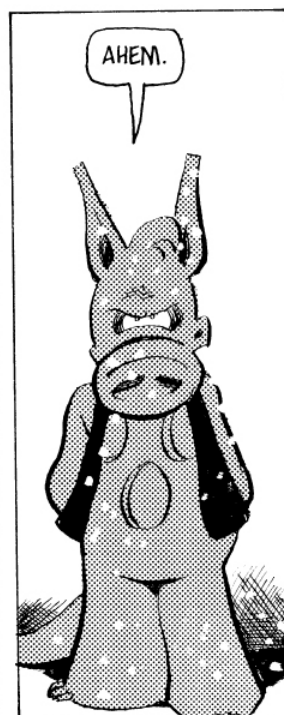
CEREBUS IS
IN BEDUIN?





"CAPTAIN COCKROACH!"







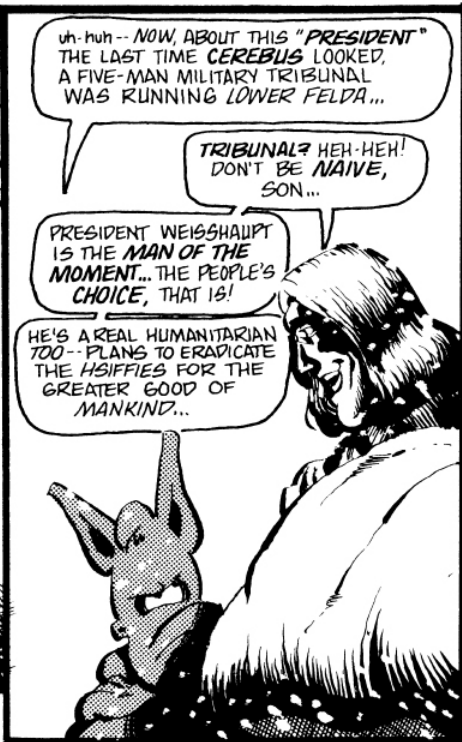
WELL, PARBOIL MY HINDQUARTERS IF IT ISN'T...

CEREBUS JUST HAS A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS AND THEN HE HAS A WAR TO CATCH-- QUESTION ONE: ...

... HSIFFY?

DEROGATORY REFERENCE TO PERSONNEL INDIGENOUS TO THE HSIFFAN KHANATE

...SEEMS TO FAIRLY LINHNGE THE LITTLE BUGGERS USED IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT



uh-huh-- NOW, ABOUT THIS "PRESIDENT" THE LAST TIME CEREBUS LOOKED, A FIVE-MAN MILITARY TRIBUNAL WAS RUNNING LOWER FELDA...

TRIBUNAL? HEH-HEH! DON'T BE NAIVE, SON...

PRESIDENT WEISSHAUPT IS THE MAN OF THE MOMENT... THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE, THAT IS!

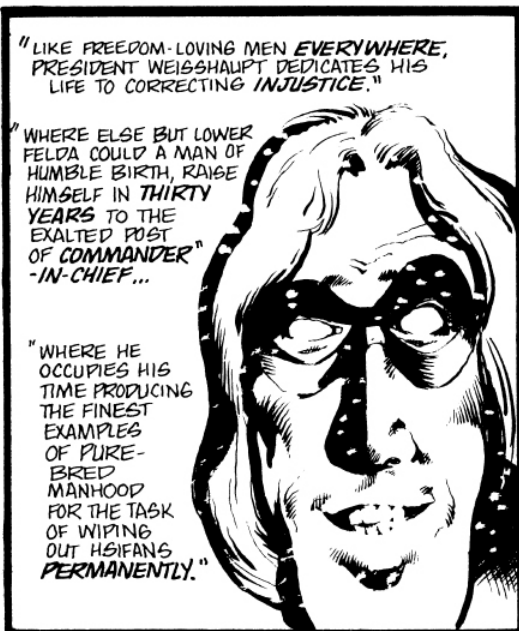
HE'S A REAL HUMANITARIAN TOO-- PLANS TO ERADICATE THE HSIFFIES FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF MANKIND...



uh-huh

AND WHAT DOES THIS DEMI-GOD GET OUT OF THE DEAL?

THE JOY OF BEING THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY, SON...



"LIKE FREEDOM-LOVING MEN EVERYWHERE, PRESIDENT WEISSHAUPT DEDICATES HIS LIFE TO CORRECTING INJUSTICE."

"WHERE ELSE BUT LOWER FELDA COULD A MAN OF HUMBLE BIRTH, RAISE HIMSELF IN THIRTY YEARS TO THE EXALTED POST OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF..."

"WHERE HE OCCUPIES HIS TIME PRODUCING THE FINEST EXAMPLES OF PURE-BRED MANHOOD FOR THE TASK OF WIPING OUT HSIFFANS PERMANENTLY."



WE'RE GOING TO SEE HIM NOW IF Y'ALL...

TEN MINUTES.

AND THEN CEREBUS WILL HAVE TO LEAVE...



WATCH YOUR STEP!
THESE-- I SAY--
THESE STAIRS
ARE ABOUT AS
SHAKY AS A LONG-
TAILED CAT IN A
ROOMFUL OF
ROCKING CHAIRS

UNSAFE,
THAT
IS...



THE OVAL HIDEOUT IS
DOWN H'VAR, SON!
THIS IS WHERE THE
PRESIDENT PLANS
WHAT HE'S GOING
TO DO TO THE
COUNTRY...

WE HAVE
TO WAIT
HERE

CAPTAIN COCKROACH IS
ALWAYS THE FIRST TO
ENTER THE OVAL
HIDEOUT...



IT MIGHT
BE A FEW
MINUTES,
YET...

THE OH-AY-EF IS A
LITTLE SEE-EL-YOU-
EM-ESS-WHY...

IF Y'ALL
CATCH
MY DRIFT
...



MR. PRESIDENT...

CAPTAIN COCKROACH
REPORTING, SIR!

AT EASE,
CAPTAIN
...

I'VE BROUGHT A
FOREIGNER OF INDETERMINATE
ORIGIN TO MEET YOU, SIR

MMM. I CERTAINLY
HOPE HE'S CLEANER
THAN THE LAST ONE
...



MOMENTS LATER...

OH, YES
SIR,
MR. PRESIDENT

RIGHT
AWAY,
SIR...



LISTEN FOR SOME REASON HE
WANTS TO SEE YOU ALONE INSIDE
THERE ARE A FEW THINGS YOU
HAVE TO KEEP FROM DOING NO
MATTER WHAT HAPPENS IN
THERE ONE: DON'T UNDER ANY

MOVE YOUR
HANDS OR
LOSE THEM,
COOTIE.



YOU SEE?
YOU SEE?

YOU CAN'T SAY THINGS
LIKE THAT TO THE
PRESIDENT!

IF HE WANTS TO TOUCH
YOU, YOU'RE GOING TO
HAVE TO LET HIM!
YOU UNDERSTAND?!

YOU-MUST-NOT-BREAK
-THE-PRESIDENT!!



CAPTAIN? IS HE
COMING IN OR
NOT...?

OH, YESSIR,
MR. PRESIDENT!
TWO SHAKES
OF A LAMB'S
TAIL, SIR!



DON'T
TOUCH
ANYTHING

DON'T MENTION
HIS FAMILY

CALL HIM
MR. PRESIDENT

DON'T SAY
ANYTHING
UNTIL HE
SPEAKS TO
YOU...

DON'T SIT
UNTIL HE
DOES

DON'T EAT
THE FRUIT

APPROACH THE
DESK FROM THE
LEFT IF HE'S
BEHIND IT...

AND WHATEVER YOU DO,
DON'T STARE AT HIS
ANKLE!!

WHA...? IS HE A
CRIPPLE OR
SOMETHING?

oh my...

...GOD.





"AS THE PERSON WHO HAS BENEFITTED THE MOST FROM YOUR GENERALLY UNKNOWN ACCOMPLISHMENT OF LAST SPRING (I REFER TO YOUR REMARKABLE TAMING OF THE HIGHLY VOLATILE COCKROACH) I HAVE LONG HOPED I'D HAVE A CHANCE LIKE THIS TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIMELY (IF SOMEWHAT UNWITTING) AID."

"AS IT HAPPENS, I CAME ALONG MERE MOMENTS AFTER YOU DEPARTED THE SCENE*. I WAS PLANNING A NEW ECONOMIC SYSTEM AS A STOP-GAP MEASURE TO HALT THE DECLINING EMPLOYMENT AND INFLATED CURRENCY SITUATION. PROVISIONALLY, I FELT CERTAIN THAT WE COULD BROADEN OUR ECONOMIC BASE IN LOWER FELDA BY KEEPING GOVERNMENT STORES OF PRECIOUS METALS AND CURRENCY..."

* SEE CEREBUS #12 "BEDUIN BY NIGHT"



"BUT WHEN I SAW THE COCKROACH UNCONSCIOUS THERE, EVERYTHING JUST SEEMED TO JELL INTO A DEFINITE PLAN...WHICH AT THAT TIME CONSISTED OF A FEW LIMITED OBJECTIVES..."

I SAY
THERE, OLD
FELLOW...

THAT WOULDN'T
HAPPEN TO BE **THE**
COCKROACH IN THE
PURPLE SUIT
WOULD IT?



WHY, NOW THAT YOU MENTION
IT, I BELIEVE THAT'S WHAT
HE SAID... ACCENT ON THE "OACH"
I BELIEVE... **RECALL**, THAT IS...

I'LL GIVE YOU TWO
GOLD COINS, IF YOU'LL
CARRY HIM TO MY HOUSE
...

IF Y'ALL WAIT 'TIL HE WAKES UP
YOU COULD PROBABLY CONVINCE
HIM TO **WALK** THERE FOR FREE
...



MM. ACTUALLY,
I PREFER HIM
THIS WAY FOR
THE TIME
BEING ...

NEVER... I SAY...
NEVER LET IT BE
SAID THAT ELROD
OF MELVINBONE
TURNED DOWN A
HIGH-PAYING
JOB...

"HE TOLD ME ALL ABOUT YOUR SET-TO
WITH THE GENDARMES..."

"AND WHEN THE COCKROACH TALKED TO ME
LATER HE FILLED IN MOST OF THE BLANKS..."





"WHEN WE ARRIVED HERE, I HAD ELROD REMOVED TO A GUEST ROOM WHERE HE STAYED FOR THE SIX MONTHS I NEEDED..."



"I THEN HAD THE COCKROACH BROUGHT DOWNSTAIRS, STILL UNCONSCIOUS..."

"I HAD HEARD ENOUGH ABOUT HIM TO FEEL I COULD PERSUADE HIM TO DIRECT HIS ENERGIES INTO MORE **USEFUL** DISCIPLINES"

"...AND MAKING ME RICH BEYOND MY WILDEST DREAMS SEEMED AS GOOD A PLACE AS ANY TO **START**..."



"HE AWOKED ABOUT AN HOUR LATER..."

"I TOLD HIM HE WAS IMMERSSED IN A MIRACLE SOLUTION OF ALUCASE WHICH MADE HIS MUSCLES LARGER EVERY TIME HE USED THEM. I EXPLAINED THAT PROF. REISENSHEIN HAD DIED BEFORE HE COULD REVEAL THE FORMULA AND THAT HE (THE COCKROACH) WAS THE ONLY TEST CASE."



"I ADDED THAT IT SEEMED TO ME, AS PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED FELDWAR STATES, THAT SOMEONE WITH THAT KIND OF ADVANTAGE WHO DIDN'T MAKE USE OF IT WAS **OBVIOUSLY** A NO-GOOD ROTTEN STINKING SCUM OF A HSIKAN TRAITOR..."

"HE PLEDGED LINDYING FEALTY..."

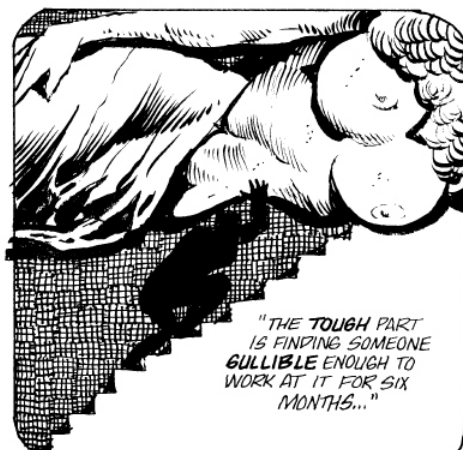


"BUT, THE SOLUTION WAS A **FAKE**-- HOW DID YOU BUILD HIS MUSCLES?"



"I HAD HIM MOVE MY COLLECTION OF MARBLE STATUES FROM THE BASEMENT TO THE ATTIC..."

"IT'S ACTUALLY NOT DIFFICULT TO BUILD A PHYSICALLY SUPERIOR HUMAN SPECIMEN..."



"THE **TOUGH** PART IS FINDING SOMEONE **GULLIBLE** ENOUGH TO WORK AT IT FOR SIX MONTHS..."

"ELROD WAS MOST IMPRESSED, HE PROMISED TO WORK GRATIS IF HE COULD BE THE SUBJECT OF THE NEXT EXPERIMENT."

"CEREBUS DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WOULD NEED ELROD."

"I PLAN TO RUN LOWER FELDA IN A FEW YEARS"

"AND I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT IF YOU CAN'T FOOL ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME, YOU SHOULD START BREEDING THEM FOR STUPIDITY..."



"I RELEASED THE FIRST OF MY 'MESSAGES' DETAILING **PROFESSOR REISENSHEIN'S** NEW INVENTION, ANNOUNCING THAT THE COCKROACH WAS THE SUBJECT OF THE FIRST TEST AND NOTIFYING THE POPULACE THAT AS PRESIDENT I WAS CONFERRING UPON HIM THE HONORARY TITLE OF "CAPTAIN" IN THE ARMY OF LOWER FELDA..."

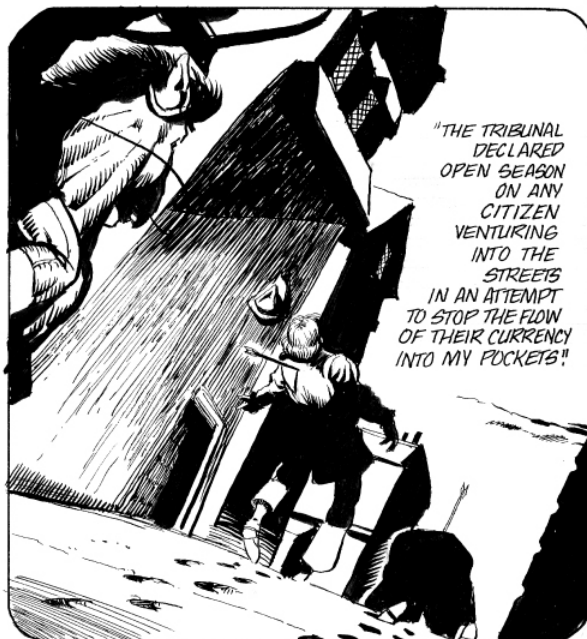
"THE NEXT WEEK I ANNOUNCED THAT PROFESSOR REISENSHEIN HAD BEEN KILLED BY HSI-FAN SPIES, THAT CAPT. COCKROACH WAS GOING TO THE PEOPLE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO HELP REDISCOVER THE FORMULA FOR "ALUCAGE,"



"I ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT EACH CONTRIBUTION OF SIX SILVER PIECES WOULD ENTITLE THE BUYER TO A WAR BOND WORTH TWELVE SILVER PEECES AT ANY SHOP IN BEDUIN..."



BUSINESS WAS (QUITE UNDERSTANDABLY) FAIRLY **BRISK**...



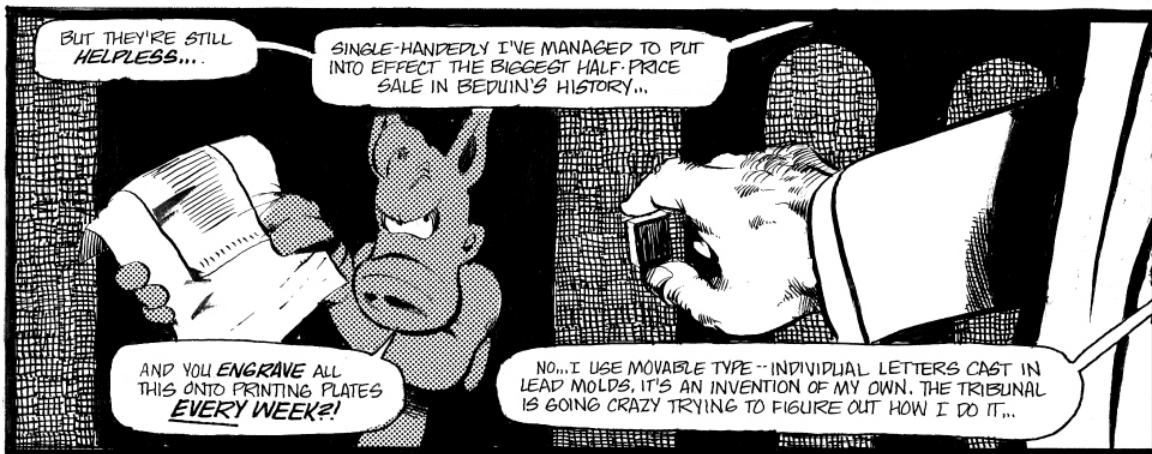
"THE TRIBUNAL DECLARED OPEN SEASON ON ANY CITIZEN VENTURING INTO THE STREETS IN AN ATTEMPT TO STOP THE FLOW OF THEIR CURRENCY INTO MY POCKETS!"

BUT THEY'RE STILL **HELPLESS**...

SINGLE-HANDEDLY I'VE MANAGED TO PUT INTO EFFECT THE BIGGEST HALF-PRICE SALE IN BEDUIN'S HISTORY...

AND YOU **ENGRAVE** ALL THIS ONTO PRINTING PLATES **EVERY WEEK?**

NO...I USE MOVABLE TYPE--INDIVIDUAL LETTERS CAST IN LEAD MOLDS. IT'S AN INVENTION OF MY OWN. THE TRIBUNAL IS GOING CRAZY TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW I DO IT...





YOU CONNED THE COCKROACH INTO BUILDING HIMSELF INTO A WALKING MUSCLE EXHIBIT...

...BUT HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO MAKE HIM A FOOT TALLER?

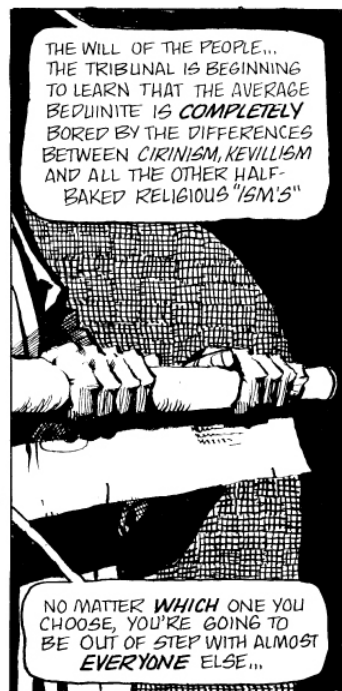


HAND-MADE BOOTS WITH A FORM-FITTING SPACE TO HOLD HIS FOOT IN A VERTICAL POSITION...

WITH THE AMOUNT OF MONEY I'M TAKING IN, I THOUGHT THE LEAST I COULD DO WAS MAKE SURE EVERYONE GETS A GOOD LOOK AT THE BIG LUG...



NOW...
HOW DOES ALL THIS TIE IN WITH WIPING OUT THE HSIFANS?



THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE... THE TRIBUNAL IS BEGINNING TO LEARN THAT THE AVERAGE BEDUINITE IS COMPLETELY BORED BY THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CIRINISM, KEVILLISM AND ALL THE OTHER HALF-BAKED RELIGIOUS 'ISM'S"

NO MATTER WHICH ONE YOU CHOOSE, YOU'RE GOING TO BE OUT OF STEP WITH ALMOST EVERYONE ELSE...



BUT IT ISN'T HARD TO GET A CONSENSUS ABOUT HSIFANS-- THEY'RE YELLOW-SKINNED, THEIR EYES LOOK FUNNY AND THEY'RE NOMADS, FOR TARIK'S SAKE

AND WHAT'S MORE, NO ONE IN LOWER FELDA EVER SEES ONE...

ALL I'VE DONE IS PUT ON PAPER WHAT YOU CAN HEAR ON ANY STREET CORNER IN THIS CITY-- THE HSIFANS ARE SNEAKY, BAD-SMELLING, GIBBERISH-SPOUTING LITTLE WEASEL-EYED DEMONS WHO THINK THEY'RE TOO GOOD FOR US DECENT CIVILIZED FOLK, AND IF WE DON'T ELIMINATE THEM NOW, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY PITCH TENTS IN OUR LIVING ROOMS



BUT THE TRIBUNAL HAS A "HANDS OFF" POLICY TOWARDS THE HSIFAN DON'T THEY?

FOR THE MOMENT.

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I CALLED FOR BEDUIN'S ADULT MALES TO ENTER THE ARMY VOLUNTARILY SO WE CAN PREPARE FOR A MASSIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE HSIFAN KHANATE...

REGISTRATION TRIPLED OVERNIGHT...



SO IF THE TRIBUNAL DOESN'T DECLARE WAR ON THE HSIFANS

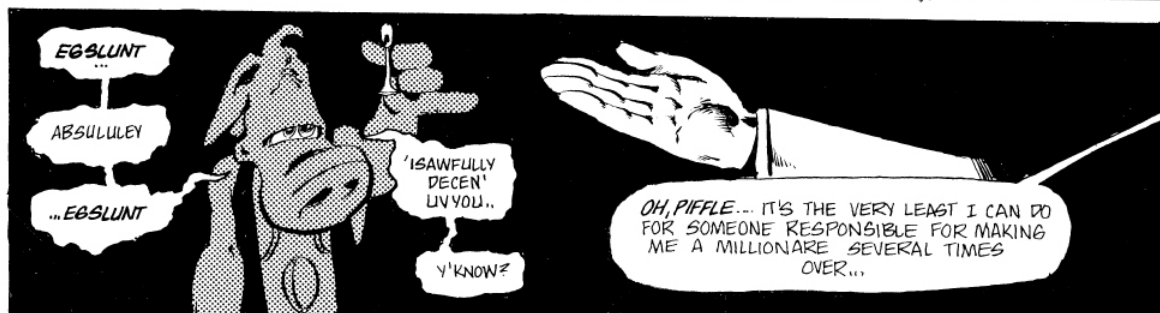
THEY'LL BE FACING AN UNPARALLELED INSURRECTION IN THE RANKS...

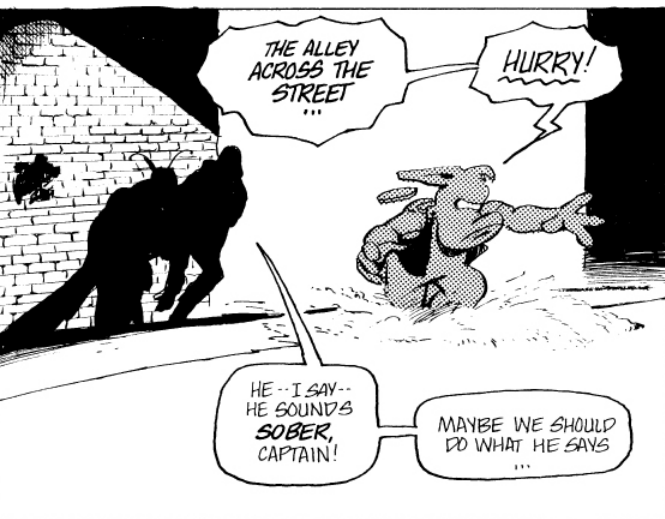
EXACTLY...

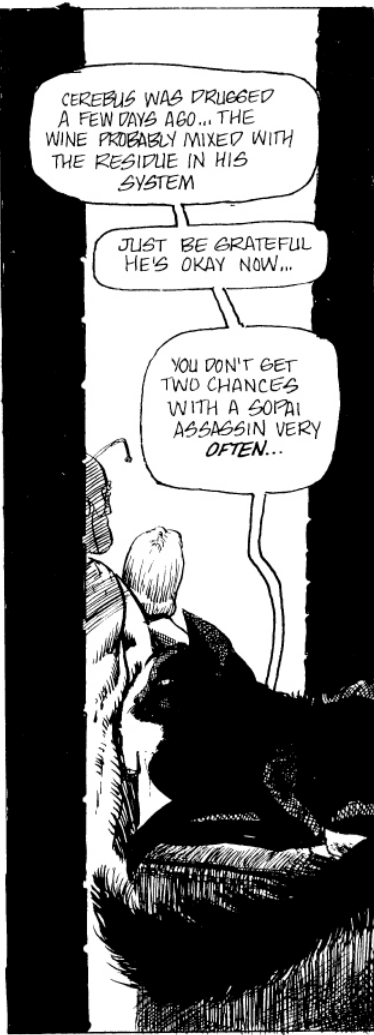


WELL, CEREBUS SAID HE WOULD STAY FOR TEN MINUTES, AND HE CERTAINLY GOT HIS MONEY'S WORTH...

HAVE FUN.









I THINK...

I SAY-- I THINK HE'S SUFFERED A RELAPSE...

NOPE NOPE CERBUS HASN'T GOT A CLUE...



YEAH?

WELL, THAT SUITS CAPTAIN COCKROACH JUST FINE...

I NEVER DID MUCH CARE FOR RUNNING FROM A SCRAP...



WHAT...uh DO YOU THINK WE OUGHT TO DO?

THAT DEPENDS SON-- DEPENDS ON WHAT CERBUS WAS ABOUT TO TELL US NOT TO DO...

IF HE WAS ABOUT TO SAY "YOU NEVER STAY IN ONE PLACE WHEN FACING A SOPAI"...

"THEN I THINK WE SHOULD GRAB HIM AND MAKE A RUN FOR IT..."

DOO-DAH DOO-DAH
=HIC=



THAT SOUNDS GOOD TO ME! SHOW THE RAT-EYED LITTLE HSIFFY SCUM HE CAN'T TRAP US...

ON THE OTHER HAND...

IF HE WAS ABOUT TO SAY "NEVER LEAVE YOUR PLACE OF CONCEALMENT," THEN I THINK WE SHOULD STAY HERE...



THE WAY I FIGURE IT, THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN IF WE TRY RUNNING IS THAT WE GET OUR BRAINS BASHED OUT...

UNFORTUNATELY...

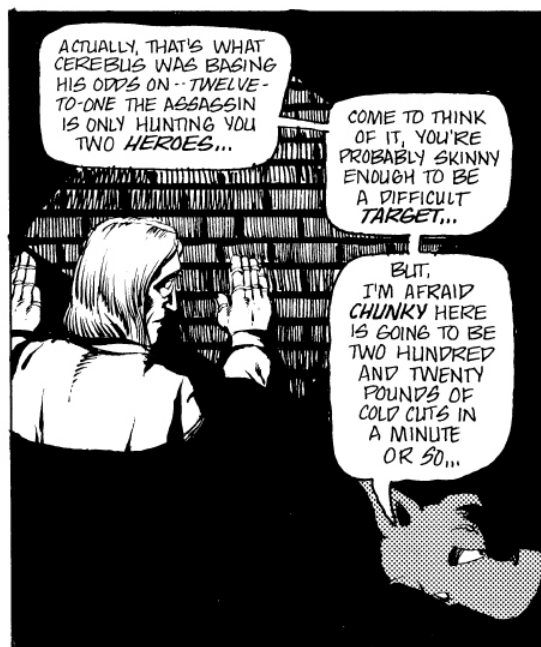
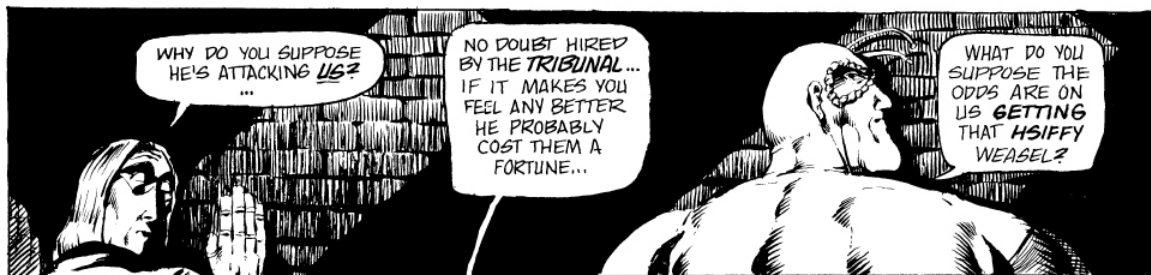
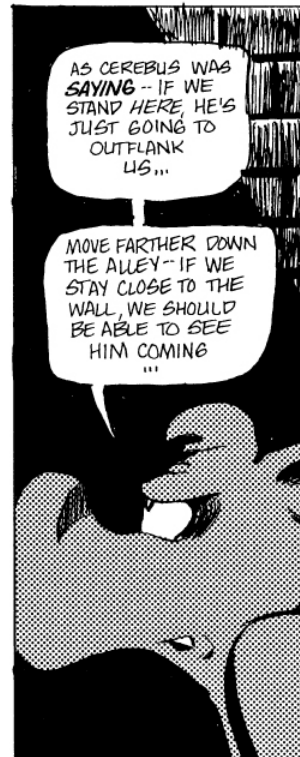
THAT'S-- I SAY-- THAT'S ALSO THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN IF WE STAY PUT...

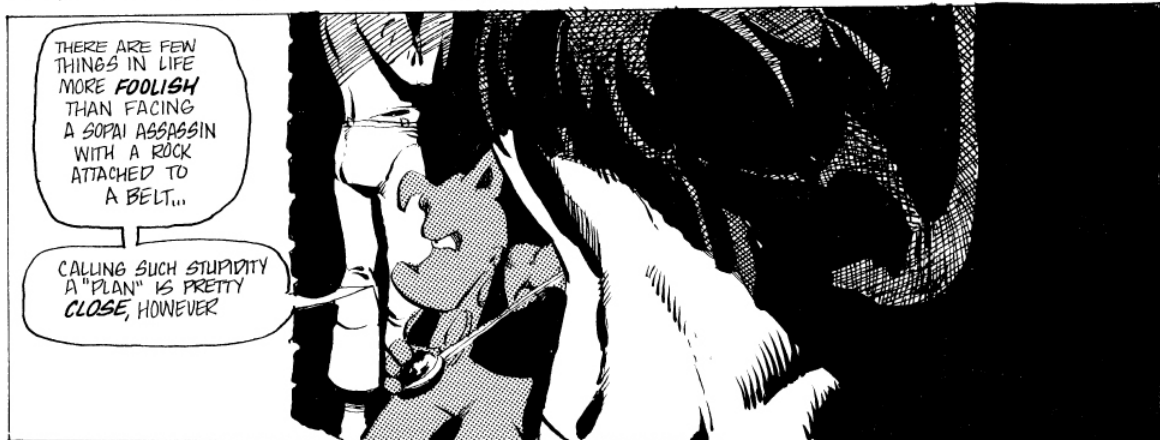


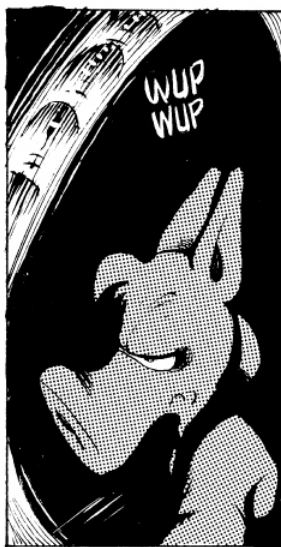
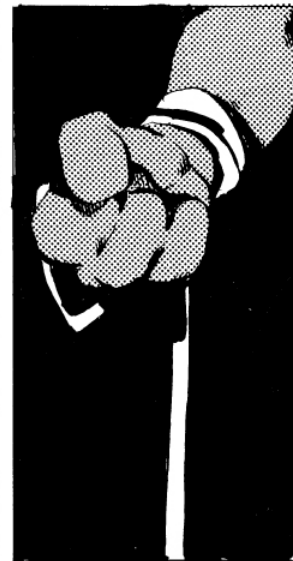
YEAH?

WELL, YOU FORGET, BUNKY OLD CHUM, THAT CAPTAIN COCKROACH IS A PROTOTYPE OF THE SUPERMEN OF THE FUTURE!

YOU CAN WAIT HERE WITH THAT WINO BUNNY 'TIL YOU GROW SOME EYEBALLS, BUT CAPTAIN COCKROACH









NEXT:

The DEATH of ELROD

THE DEATH of ELROD

SYNOPSIS: CEREBUS LIES SPRAWLED IN THE SNOW, AS CAPTAIN COCKROACH AND BUNKY COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT IT IS DEFINITELY ADVISABLE THAT THEY PREPARE TO IMMEDIATELY TAKE THE NEXT STEP, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS...

AS DANGER LOOMS
NEARBY...

...BUNKY (AKA ELROD)
SUGGESTS A
BOLD PLAN...

HOWZABOUT
YOU TURN YOUR
SELF IN IF
THEY PROMISE
NOT TO HURT
ME?

YOU'RE PANICKING
FOR NO REASON, OLD
CHUM--WE HAVE TO AID
OUR LITTLE GRAY WOUNDED
WINO...





* LIVES IN A WORLD ALL HIS OWN, FOLKS...





BUNKY?

IS IT
REALLY
YOU...?

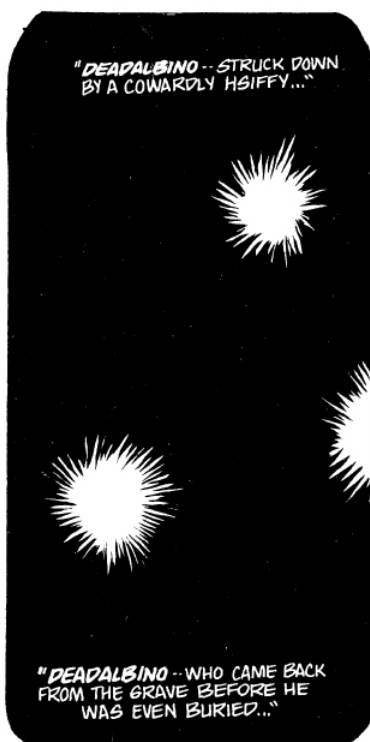
REALLY
AND TRULY?



BUNKY? BUNKY IS FACE DOWN
IN THE SNOW, SON-- I'VE-- I
SAY, I'VE TRADED IN MY RUGGED
GOOD LOOKS AND SENSITIVE
DEMEANOR FOR A NEAR
MONOPOLY IN THE MUSCLE
MARKET...

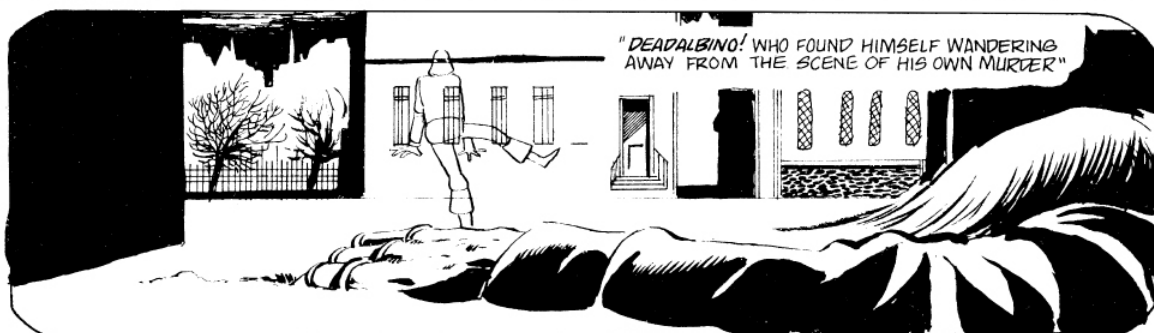
I NEED A NEW NAME THAT FITS
MY NEW IMAGE--SOMETHING
WITH PANACHE--LIKE DEADALBINO!

DEADALBINO?



"DEADALBINO--STRUCK DOWN
BY A COWARDLY HSIFFY..."

"DEADALBINO--WHO CAME BACK
FROM THE GRAVE BEFORE HE
WAS EVEN BURIED..."



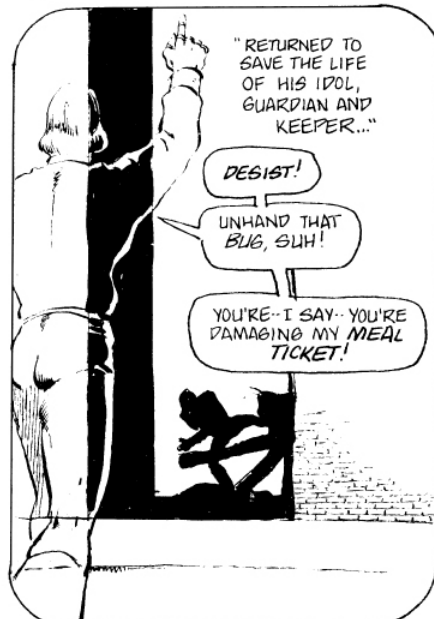
"DEADALBINO! WHO FOUND HIMSELF WANDERING
AWAY FROM THE SCENE OF HIS OWN MURDER"



"DEADALBINO! WHO
FOUND THAT HE WAS
NO LONGER QUITE ALL
THERE (PHYSICALLY,
THAT IS)..."



"DEADALBINO!
WHO, DESPITE
THE TRAUMA
OF BEING
DEAD..."



"RETURNED TO
SAVE THE LIFE
OF HIS IDOL,
GUARDIAN AND
KEEPER..."

DESIST!

UNHAND THAT
BUG, SUH!

YOU'RE--I SAY--YOU'RE
DAMAGING MY MEAL
TICKET!

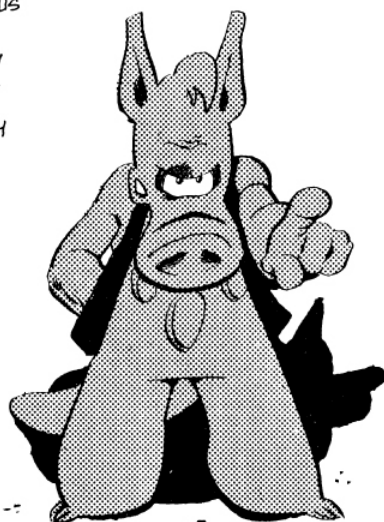




THAT'S RIGHT-- A WAR! CEREBUS IS ALLIED WITH A WELL-ORGANIZED AND HEAVILY-ARMED BAND OF T'GITANS! ON CONCORDANCE EVE WE'RE GOING TO MARCH ON THE CITY OF PALNU AND SMASH IT INTO SUBMISSION...

WITH THAT ANCIENT CITY AS A BASE AND USING ITS WEALTH AS PAY FOR THE FINEST MERCENARIES, WE'RE GOING TO PROVE THAT THESE DAMNED SOUTHLAND SOLDIERS WILL FALL LIKE MATCH-STICKS WHEN FACED WITH A REAL ARMY

AN ARMY THAT DOESN'T WHINE IF YOU DON'T STOP EVERY FEW MILES FOR HOT CHOCOLATE AND MARSHMALLOWS...



BEDUIN IS RIPE FOR THE TAKING-- AND CEREBUS ISN'T TALKING ABOUT IDIOTIC PAMPHLETS AND SIDE-SHOW STRONGMEN --WHEN WE TAKE BEDUIN, IT WILL BE BY FORCE-OF-ARMS...

YOU SOUTHLANDERS TALK AND TALK AND TALK! SAY WHAT YOU WILL ABOUT T'GITANS-- THEY SMELL BAD, THEY HAVE NO TABLE MANNERS-- BUT, BY TARIM AT LEAST THEY DON'T SPEND EVERY WAKING MINUTE FILLING THE AIR AROUND THEM WITH BLOODY WORDS!

SO, YOU TAKE YOUR PHILOSOPHERS AND YOUR MAGISTRATES AND YOUR PRIESTS AND YOUR CLERKS AND YOUR MERCHANTS AND YOU PILE THEM SIX DEEP AROUND THE CITY WALLS BECAUSE WHEN WE DO ATTACK THAT'S ABOUT ALL THEY'RE GOING TO BE GOOD FOR...



IT'S NOT THAT CEREBUS HAS ANYTHING AGAINST WEAK-WILLED, OVER-EDUCATED, SNIVELLING CITY-DWELLERS PERSONALLY, IT'S JUST THAT...

uh...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

MILITARY REPORTS FOR THE LAST MONTH

AH!



"PALNU ATTACKED ON CONCORDANCE EVE BY T'GITANS AND MERCENARY LIGHT CAVALRY AND PIKE..."

"ATTACKERS REPELLED AND HUNTED DOWN BY LORD GORCE'S TROOPS"

"NO SURVIVORS"



CONCORDANCE EVE WAS SOME WEEKS AGO...

IT WOULD APPEAR THAT YOU WERE DRUGGED A LITTLE MORE THOROUGHLY THAN YOU FIRST THOUGHT...



OH YEAH?

YOU THINK THAT COMES AS A SURPRISE TO CEREBUS?

YOU THINK CEREBUS DIDN'T KNOW THAT?

HUH?



YOU'RE NOT AS SMART AS YOU THINK YOU ARE, SOUTHLANDER...



THIS IS JUST A MINOR SETBACK! NO PROBLEM...



IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN JUST ONE BATTLE TO...



OKAY OKAY

HOW DID THE SOPAI ASSASSIN GET ELROD'S VOICE?



NOW THAT WE'RE
ALL UP-TO-DATE
ON OUR **PRESENT**
SITUATION...

I THINK WE SHOULD
EXAMINE OUR STRENGTHS
AND WEAKNESSES AND
DETERMINE HOW WE
CAN **BEST** UTILIZE THEM
IN THE NEAR FUTURE...

AS WELL AS DETERMINING
A LONG-RANGE FORECAST
OF OUR **OBJECTIVES**...



MR. PRESIDENT, I THINK THE
FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS
SHOULD BE THE **EXECUTION**
OF ANY **HSIFFIES** PRESENT
IN THIS ROOM...

AS A SECURITY
PRECAUTION...



ACTUALLY, MR. PRESIDENT--
THE **BEE-YOU-GEE** IS JUST
A LITTLE **ATCH-YOU-ARE-**
TEE ABOUT ME **BEE-EE-AY**
TEEING HIM TO A **PEE-YOU-**
EL-PEE...

THAT'S A
LIE!

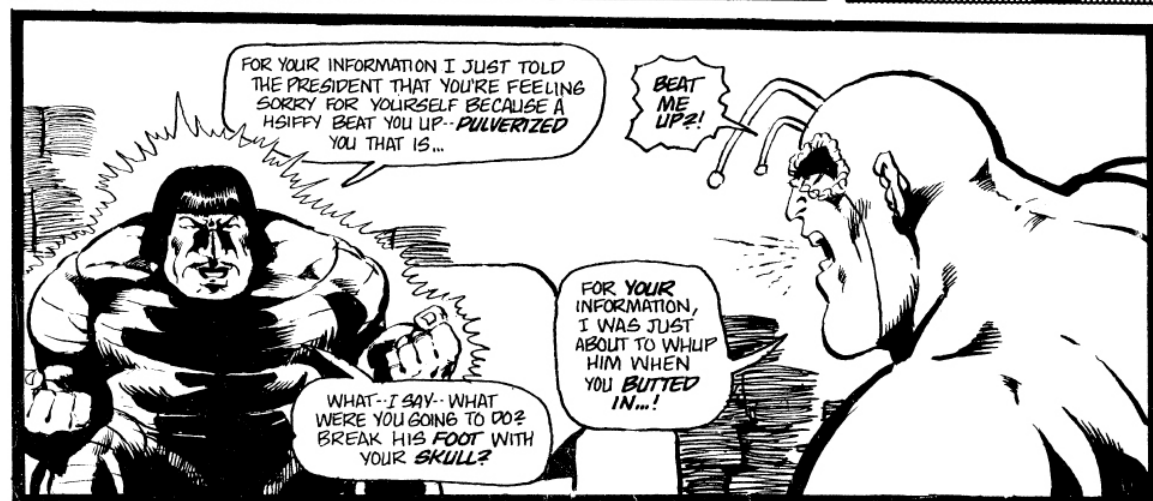


YOU-- I SAY-- YOU DON'T
EVEN KNOW WHAT
I **SAID**, SON...

IT DOESN'T **MATTER**
WHAT YOU **SAID**--
YOU **LIE** ALL THE
TIME!!

OH,
YEAH?!

TARIM.

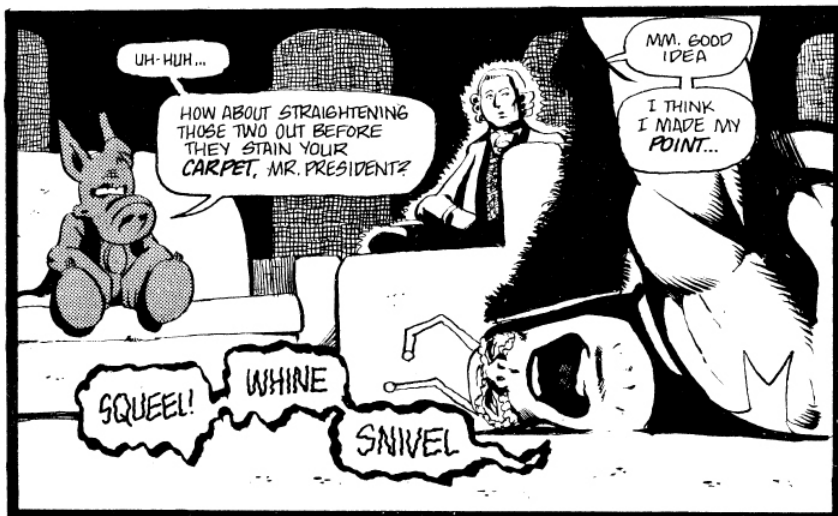


FOR YOUR INFORMATION I JUST TOLD
THE PRESIDENT THAT YOU'RE FEELING
SORRY FOR YOURSELF BECAUSE A
HSIFFY BEAT YOU UP-- **PULVERIZED**
YOU THAT IS...

BEAT
ME
UP?!

FOR YOUR
INFORMATION,
I WAS JUST
ABOUT TO WHUP
HIM WHEN
YOU **BUTTED**
IN...!

WHAT-- I SAY-- WHAT
WERE YOU GOING TO DO?
BREAK HIS FOOT WITH
YOUR **SKULL**?





EASY--
I SAY
EASY
SON...

...YOU LOOK LIKE YOU
CAME IN **THIRD**
IN A HATCHET
FIGHT...

THANKS, BUNKY
OLD CHUM--
WHERE'S THAT
HSIFFY
CREEP?

DISAPPEARED,
EH? COULDN'T
TAKE IT, EH?

HEHEH
HEHEH
≡KOFF≡
≡KOFF≡

S'GOOD
THING

I WAS
STARTING
TO GET
PEEVED



CAPTAIN?

YES, MR.
PRESIDENT

YOU KNOW THE
DRAPERIES
IN THE
UPSTAIRS
STUDY?

OH, YESSIR
MR. PRESIDENT!

BE A GOOD
CHAP AND
GO WATCH
THEM FOR
AWHILE

...MAKE SURE
THEY DON'T
EAT THE
HOUSE PLANTS



OH, YESSIR
MR. PRESIDENT,
SIR...

I'LL GET RIGHT
ON IT, SIR...

RIGHT
AWAY

YUP.

NO **HSIFFY**
DRAPES ARE
GOING TO
EAT THE
HOUSE PLANTS
WHILE I'M
IN CHARGE

NOSIREE
MR. PRESIDENT,
SIR...

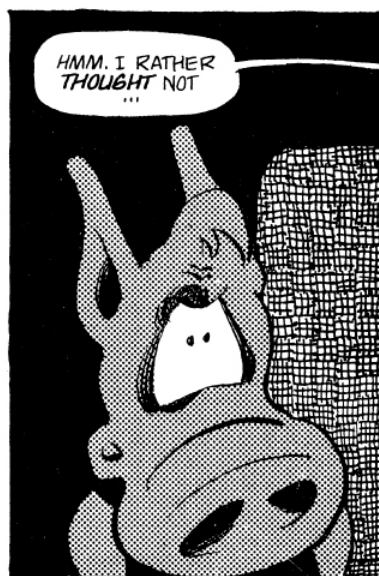


CALL IT A CRAZY
HUNCH, BUT CEREBUS
DOESN'T BELIEVE
YOU'RE **REALLY**
CONCERNED ABOUT
THE DRAPES EATING
YOUR HOUSE-
PLANTS...



A MORE
SENSIBLE STORY
WOULD ONLY HAVE
MADE HIS HEAD
HURT...

EH-- DO YOU REALIZE
ELROD JUST NOW
TOOK OVER YOUR
BODY AS WELL?



HMM. I RATHER
THOUGHT NOT



CAN YOU SEE **NOW** WHY THE BIG BUG IS NO LONGER A NECESSARY PART OF MY TEAM?

I NOW HAVE SOMEONE ON MY SIDE WHO IS CAPABLE OF ASSUMING ANYONE'S BODY AT WILL...

MM. YES!

HE COULD TAKE OVER ANY BANKER'S BODY AND JUST EMPTY HIS VAULT DOWN TO THE LAST **HALF-PIECE**...

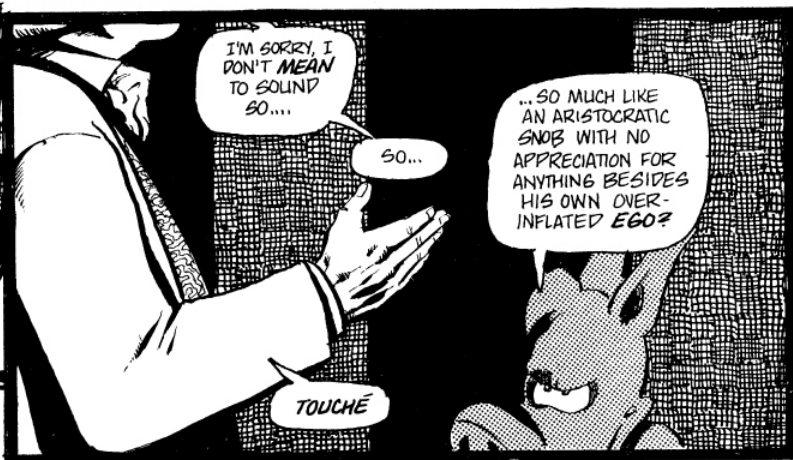


HAHAHA

IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME THAT THE LOWER CLASSES ARE AS FASCINATED BY MONEY AS THEY ARE...

MONEY OF ALL THINGS!

HAHA HAHA



I'M SORRY, I DON'T MEAN TO SOUND SO...

SO...

TOUCHÉ

...SO MUCH LIKE AN ARISTOCRATIC SNOB WITH NO APPRECIATION FOR ANYTHING BESIDES HIS OWN OVER-INFLATED EGO?



BUT **REALLY**--AN OPPORTUNITY LIKE THIS **SHOULDN'T** BE WASTED ON SOMETHING AS **MUNDANE** AS ACCUMULATING MERE CURRENCY

THERE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS, YOU KNOW...



UH-HUH? LIKE WHAT?

POWER.

POWER?

POWER IS BETTER THAN MONEY...?



MOST ASSUREDLY...

POWER ALSO IS MONEY!

LIKE THE TREASURY I'M GOING TO CONTROL AFTER ELROD TAKES OVER THE BODY OF THE EXECUTIVE GENERAL OF THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL...



IT WOULD BEAT
SENDING FRICK AND
FRACK OUT TO SELL
WAR BONDS, WOULDN'T
IT?



...



BUT THE
TRIBUNAL
IS MADE
UP OF
FIVE
MEN...

WHAT'S TO KEEP
THEM FROM OUT-
VOTING WHOMEVER
ELROD TAKES OVER?



THAT'S WHY I'M WEALTHY AND
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED
FELDWAR STATES...

...



AND
RESIGN
...



BUT THAT
LEAVES
FOUR
MEMBERS
WHO...

THREE.

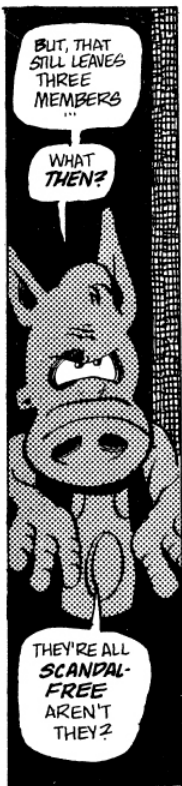
THREE?



...THAT HE WILL
ADMIT TO HIS
PART IN THE
KEVILLIST
REBELLION
FIVE YEARS
AGO...

AND
RESIGN
AS WELL?

PRECISELY.



BUT, THAT
STILL LEAVES
THREE
MEMBERS...

WHAT
THEN?

THEY'RE ALL
**SCANDAL-
FREE**
AREN'T
THEY?



AS FAR AS I
KNOW THEY
ARE...

GENERAL MINON, *HOWEVER*,
HAS FORMER EXECUTIVE
COMMANDER SERET UNDER
HIS THUMB...

IF MINON PROPOSED A MOTION
RECOMMENDING THAT SERET
COMMIT SUICIDE, SERET
WOULD **SECOND** IT...



SO?



SO ELROD THEN TAKES OVER
MINON'S BODY. ANYTHING HE
PROPOSES WILL PASS WITH
SERET'S WILLING ACQUIESCENCE

GENERAL CHEEN
WILL BE THE ONLY
DISSENTING MEMBER

AND I'LL
RULE LOWER
FELDA...

NEAT. VERY
NEAT.

I KNOW.
AMAZING
AREN'T
I?



WAIT-- I SAY-- WAIT JUST
A FLEA-FLICKIN' **MINUTE**
HERE. ALL I'VE HEARD
IS "ELROD'LL DO THIS"
AND "ELROD'LL DO THAT"

DOESN'T-- I
SAY-- DOESN'T
ANYONE WANT
TO HEAR WHAT
DEADALBINO
HAS TO SAY?

NOT
ESPECIALLY.



WHY, NOW THAT YOU
MENTION IT, WE NEED A
PLAN TO GET US PAST THE TWO
AGENDA SECRETARIES

AFTER ALL, YOU CAN'T
TAKE OVER BOTH BODIES
AT **ONE TIME!**

IT WOULD BE A
GREAT HELP IF YOU
COULD FIGURE SOME-
THING OUT...

UH...



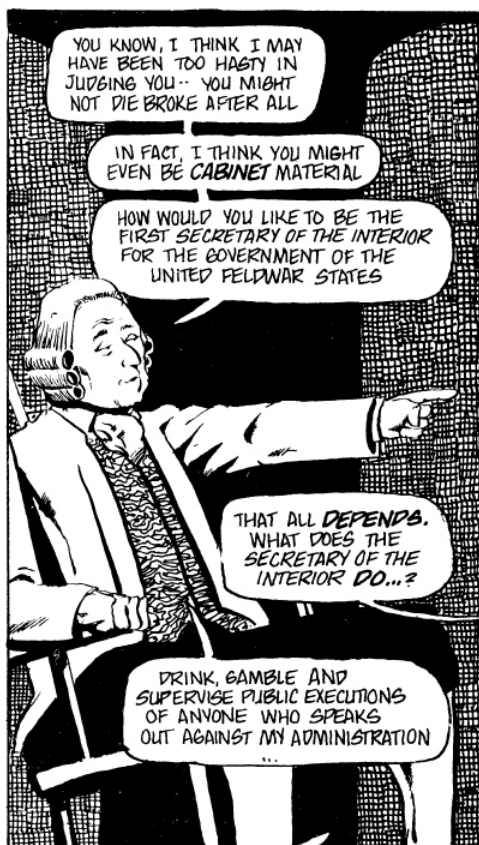
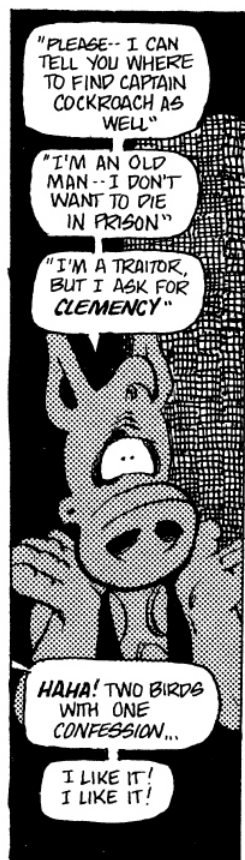
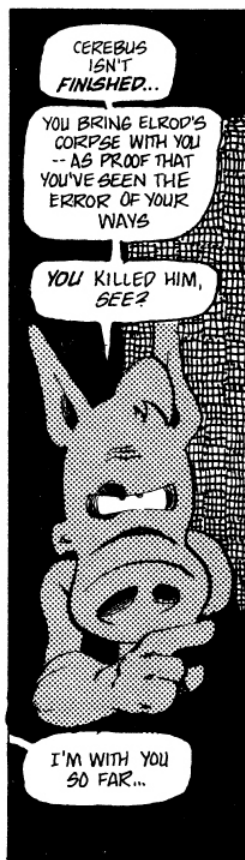
WELL-- UM-- UH-- BET US
PAST THE ADENDUM
SECRETARIES?-- I--
YEAH... I CAN SEE
HOW THAT WOULD
UH...

HMM.

I'D SURE-- I
SAY-- I'D SURE
LIKE TO BE
USEFUL.

USEFUL, EH?

IF YOU WEREN'T
SO LUMPY, YOU
MIGHT MAKE A
HALF-DECENT
SOFA...



MY FRIENDS... IT IS MY SAD DUTY ON THIS OCCASION, AS YOUR EXECUTIVE COMMANDER FOR ME... TO TAKE... THIS... OPPORTUNITY... TO EXPRESS MY... DEEPEST REGRET... THAT I MUST TAKE... FULL... RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACTIONS... OF MY BROTHER... IN THE... RECENT... SEPRAN LAMP OIL... PAYOFF... SCANDAL... NOT ONLY DID I... TELL MY BROTHER THAT SUCH ACTIONS AS HE TOOK... AT THAT TIME... WAS NOT IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST BUT... THAT IN FACT THERE EXISTED A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT BOTH HE... AND I... WOULD BE CAUGHT WITH OUR HANDS... IN THE COOKIE JAR... UP TO OUR RESPECTIVE... ELBOWS...

AMAZING!

NO EXPRESSION, NO COHERENCE AND SYNTAX. YOU COULD SPEND A LIFETIME UNRAVELLING...

HE'S SO MUCH LIKE THE ORIGINAL IT'S ALMOST SCARY...

YOU HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING YET...

WE'VE BEEN WORKING ON HIS "DESHEN"

NO, NO! MORE SCOWL!

ANGER! GIVE ME ANGER AND BITTERNESS...

ANGER, BITTERNESS AND PARANOIA!

GOOD! GOOD!

IT IS... FOR THIS REASON... THAT I INTEND... FOR REASONS PREVIOUSLY STATED TO RESIGN... EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY THIS... POSITION

I ASK... NOW... THAT THE GUARDS COME... AND TAKE... ME... AWAY...

MY FELLOW LOWER FELLPANS...

I WOULD LIKE TO ADD A FEW WORDS TO WHAT MY... "COLLEAGUE" HAS ALREADY STATED...

I AM **NOT** A CROOK...

I **AM**, HOWEVER, A SLEAZY NO-ACCOUNT OPPORTUNIST AND A BOUGHT-AND-PAID-FOR POLITICAL HACK...

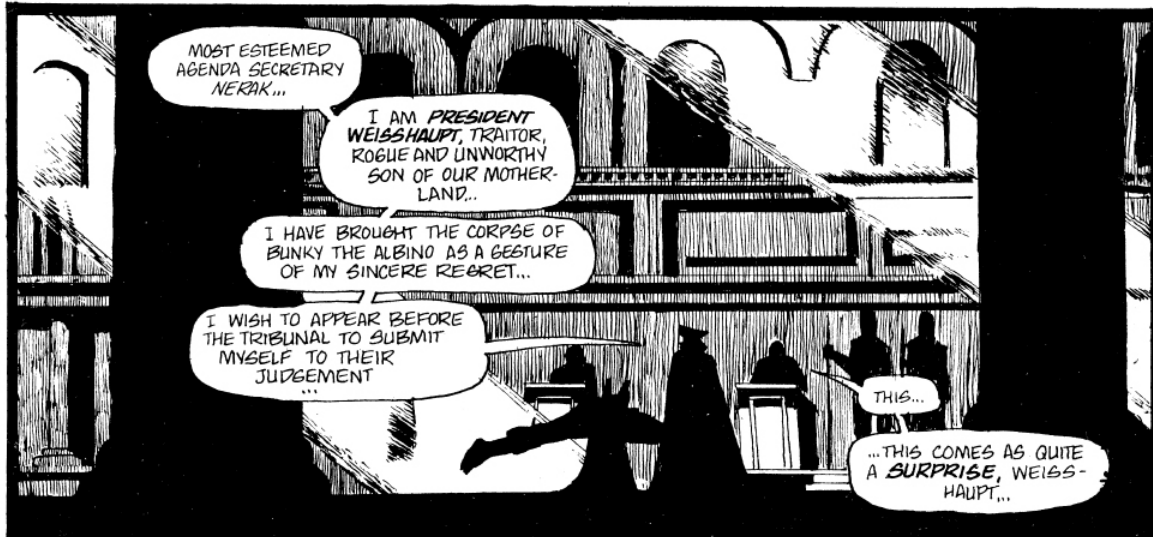
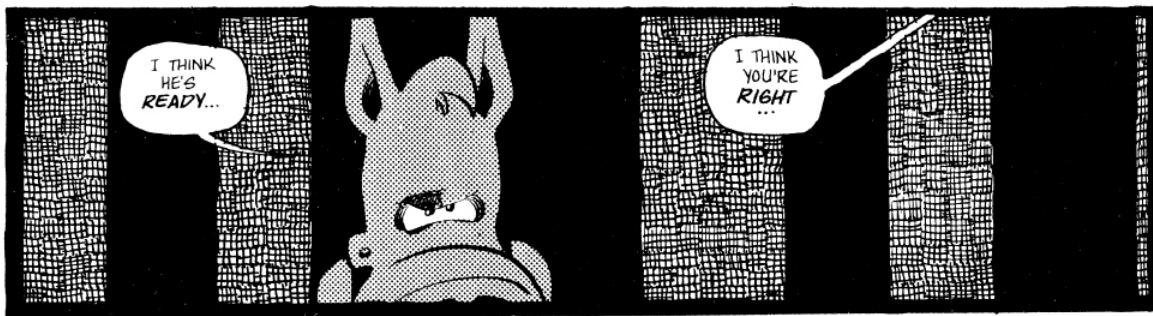
I MAY NOT HAVE **STARTED** THAT KEVILLIST REBELLION FIVE YEARS AGO...

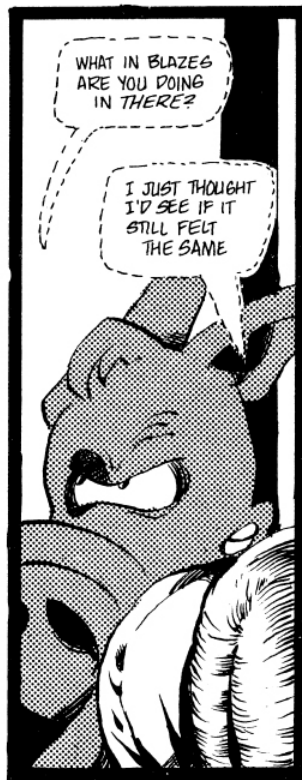
BUT IF I **DIDN'T**, IT WAS ONE OF ONLY A HANDFUL OF MAJOR SCANDALS I **DIDN'T** TAKE PART IN AT THAT TIME...

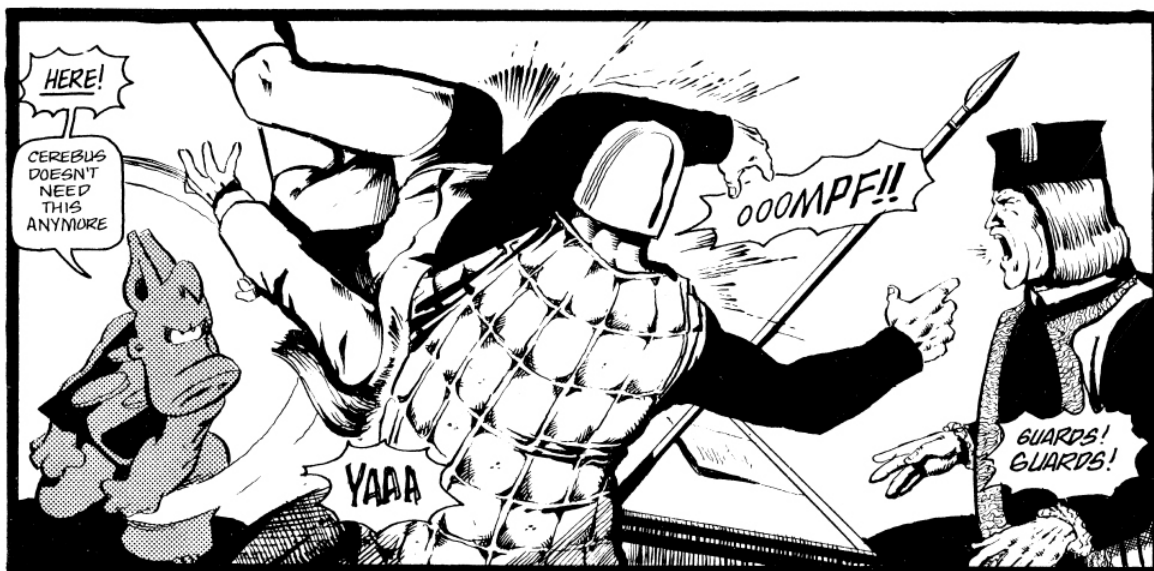
I WOULD ASK NOW THAT THE GUARDS COME AND TAKE ME AWAY, AS WELL

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED...

HANGING'S TOO **GOOD** FOR ME!



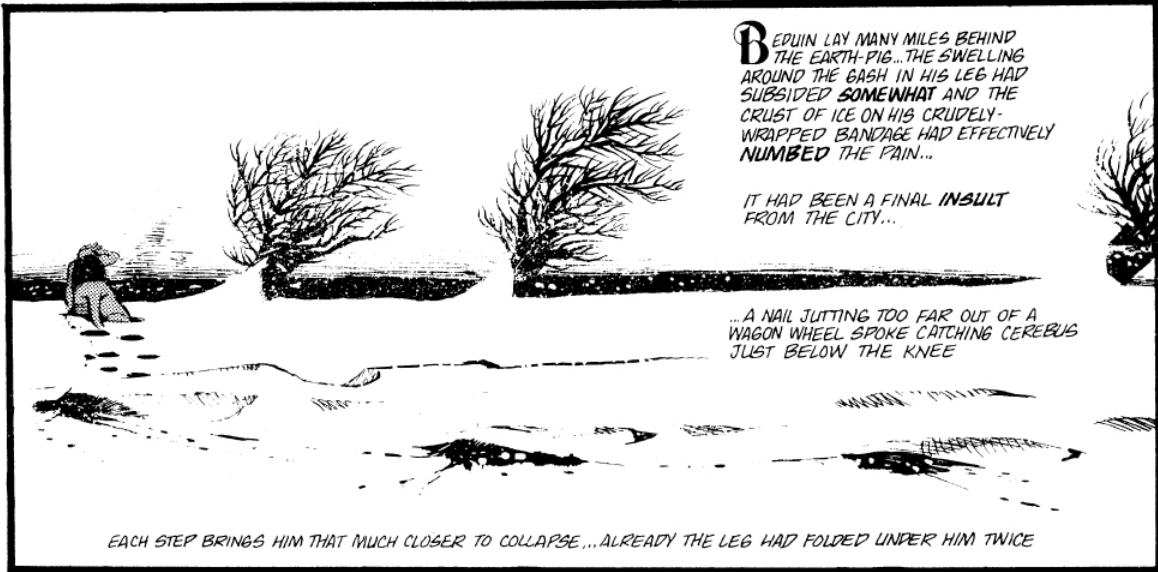








Cerebus the Aardvark



BEDUIN LAY MANY MILES BEHIND THE EARTH-PIG...THE SWELLING AROUND THE GASH IN HIS LEG HAD SUBSIDED **SOMEWHAT** AND THE CRUST OF ICE ON HIS CRUDELY-WRAPPED BANDAGE HAD EFFECTIVELY **NUMBED** THE PAIN...

IT HAD BEEN A FINAL **INSULT** FROM THE CITY...

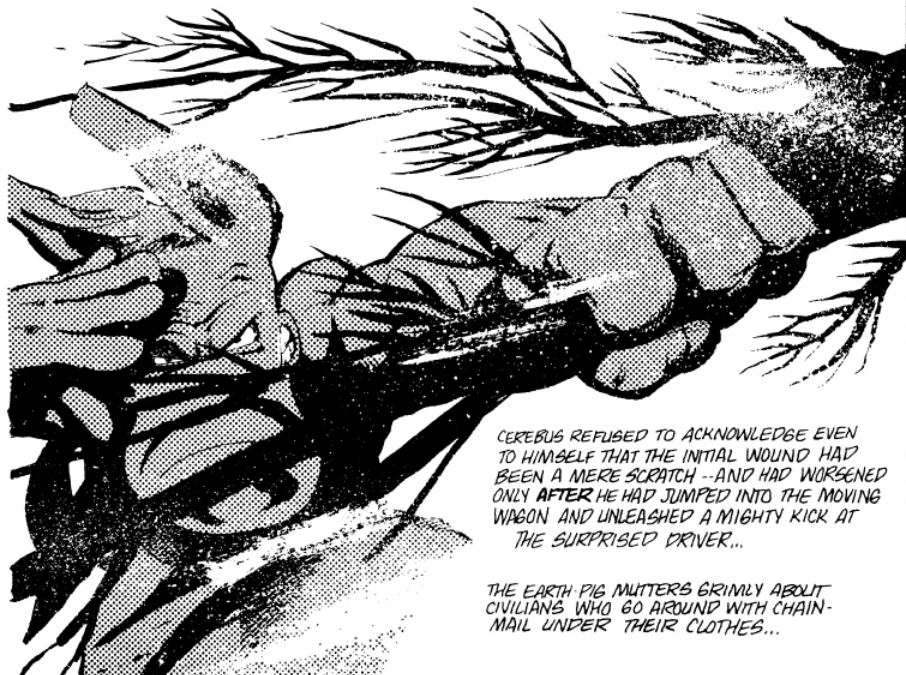
...A NAIL JUTTING TOO FAR OUT OF A WAGON WHEEL SPOKE CATCHING CEREBUS JUST BELOW THE KNEE

EACH STEP BRINGS HIM THAT MUCH CLOSER TO COLLAPSE...ALREADY THE LEG HAD FOLDED UNDER HIM TWICE



HE NEEDED SOMEPLACE DRY AND WARM TO REST HIS LEG AND SOME ALCOHOL TO CLEAN THE WOUND THOROUGHLY...

The BEGUILING



AT LAST, CEREBUS SEES A HOUSE IN THE DISTANCE ALMOST COMPLETELY OBSCURED BY THE FALLING SNOW...

CEREBUS REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE EVEN TO HIMSELF THAT THE INITIAL WOUND HAD BEEN A MERE SCRATCH --AND HAD WORSENERD ONLY AFTER HE HAD JUMPED INTO THE MOVING WAGON AND UNLEASHED A MIGHTY KICK AT THE SURPRISED DRIVER..

THE EARTH-PIG MUTTERS GRIMLY ABOUT CIVILIANS WHO GO AROUND WITH CHAIN-MAIL UNDER THEIR CLOTHES...









MY SCHOOL IS NOT WHAT IT ONCE WAS, M'SIEU... LOWER FELDA HAS SELDOM SEEN YEARS AS LEAN AS THIS...

THERESA, KATRINA AND JANETTE ARE THE ONLY GIRLS WHOSE PARENTS COULD AFFORD THE ENROLMENT FEE THIS YEAR...

THEY ARE QUITE REMARKABLE IN THEIR OWN WAYS.



I SEE I'M BORING YOU, SO I WILL COME STRAIGHT TO THE POINT...

THOSE GIRLS ARE IN MY CHARGE, M'SIEU... I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANYONE...

... **TAMPERING** WITH THEM!... I TRUST I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR...



AS A BELL, NOW IF YOU DON'T MIND...

CEREBUS WOULD LIKE TO LAZE INTO A COMA...

...FOR ABOUT A WEEK.



AS YOU WISH, M'SIEU.

THE GIRLS TAKE THEIR LESSONS DOWNSTAIRS...



SO YOU SHOULD NOT BE DISTURBED...

CEREBUS LETS HIMSELF DRIFT INTO A DREAMLESS SLUMBER...

...THE THROBBING IN HIS LEG LITTLE MORE THAN A MINOR ANNOYANCE.



MADAME DUFORT SO
DISTRUSTS OUTSIDERS
DOESN'T SHE? HER
EVERY WAKING MOMENT
IS DEVOTED TO SHELTERING
US...

FOR JANETTE AND
KATRINA WHO ARE SO
MUCH LESS *MATURE*
...THERE IS A GREAT
NEED FOR SUCH
CLOSE SUPERVISION.
I, HOWEVER, AM NOT
LIKE THEM...



FOR EXAMPLE...
IT DOES NOT FRIGHTEN ME TO BE ALONE
WITH ONE SUCH AS YOU, *M'SIEU*, YOU
PROBABLY FIND THIS ATTITUDE RE-
FRESHING-- SO MANY GIRLS FIND IT
DIFFICULT TO RELAX AROUND A
MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITE...

AROUND
MEN
I MEAN.

I THINK
STIMULATING WITH
MEN CAN BE QUITE
CONVERSATIONAL
AT TIMES.

HAHA
HA...

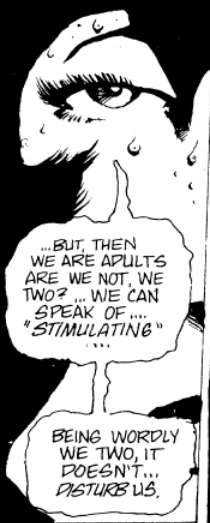
SILLY ME--
THAT'S NOT WHAT
I MEANT TO SAY
AT ALL...

CEREBUS COULD
HAVE SWORN HE
HEARD SOMEONE
MENTION WHISKEY.



...BUT, THEN
WE ARE ADULTS
ARE WE NOT, WE
TWO? ...WE CAN
SPEAK OF ...
"STIMULATING"

BEING WORDLY
WE TWO, IT
DOESN'T...
DISTURB US.



I FEEL WE HAVE
AN UNDERSTANDING
ABOUT SPEAKING
YOU AND I

WE MIGHT EVEN
SPEAK OF...*BODILY*
FUNCTIONS WERE
WE SO DISPOSED



RIGHT
RIGHT
NOW HOW
ABOUT
THE

THERESA!
A SOLDIER
APPROACHES!



I AM
SORRY,
M'SIEU

I'M AFRAID
THE SECURITY
OF THE SCHOOL
COMES FIRST...



HEY!
WAIT!

WHAT ARE
YOU GOING
TO DO?

KNIT HIM
TO DEATH?!

YOU...

HEY!!

OF ALL
THE
IDiotic



DOUBTLESS THE SIGNAL
HAD BEEN INTENDED
ONLY TO WARN THERESA
TO FIND A HIDING SPOT...

PROBABLY A HIDDEN
CLOSET OR FRUIT CELLAR
IN THE BASEMENT...

THE WOMEN
WOULD BE SAFE
AT LEAST...

**BAM
BAM**

BUT THAT MEANT
THAT CEREBUS WAS
THE MORE VULNERABLE
SITUATION...

THE EARTH-PIG
BEGINS TO FLEX
HIS MUSCLES
UNCONSCIOUSLY...

B'JORNO!

I AM MADAME
DUFORT...

CAN I
HELP YOU?

GRAZIA!

CEREBUS TRIES
TO CONVINCE HIM-
SELF THAT HIS EARS
ARE PLAYING TRICKS
ON HIM...

SURELY EVEN
MADAME DUFORT
COULDN'T BE NAIVE
ENOUGH TO ALLOW
A SOLDIER TO
ENTER HER HOUSE...

YOU' HOUSE, ANH?
MUCHA ROOM
IN HE'

VER'
NICE

VER'
WAM.

VERY
WHAT,
M'SIEU?

WAM.

NOT-A
COLT.
WAM.

AH, WELL, IT'S
NONE OF
CEREBUS'
WORRY.

YES, M'SIEU -- IT IS WARM
IN HERE, BUT I'M...

MY SOJERS REST HE'...
IN YOU HOUSE.

NO, M'SIEU, THIS IS A GIRLS'
SCHOOL; WE DO NOT ALLOW
SOLDIERS TO REST HERE...
IT ISN'T PROPER.

PROP'Z

NOT DECENT.
NOT NICE.

NO! NO!
'S VER' DECENT'
HOUSE...

'S VER'
VER' NICE
HOUSE

NO, M'SIEU -- TO HAVE SOLDIERS
HERE WOULD BE "NOT NICE".

AW! YOU GONNA
LIKE 'EM OKAY...

'S A
SWEET
ABUNCH O'
GUYS...



I'M AFRAID YOU
MISUNDERSTAND,
M'SIEU...

MY-SOJERS-
REST HE'



I DON' WANNA
HURT YOU,
OL' LADY...

BUT...

MY SOJERS
REST HE'
OKAYZ



CEREBUS REFLECTS ON
THE WISDOM OF FACING
A SEPRAN CAPTAIN WITH
A WATER JUG AS HIS
ONLY WEAPON...

YOU SAY 'YES'
ATTSA GOOD
...



HE TRIED TO LOOK
ON IT AS AN
EXPERIMENT
WITH A NEW
WEAPON...

...YOU SAY
'NO'...

...WELL...



IF IT WORKED, HE COULD ALWAYS ARM ALL
OF BEDUIN'S CRIPPLES WITH WATER
JUGS AND LAY SIEGE TO FALNU...

ATTSA NOT
SO GOOD...



I SEE WE ARE NOT
COMMUNICATING
AT ALL, M'SIEU

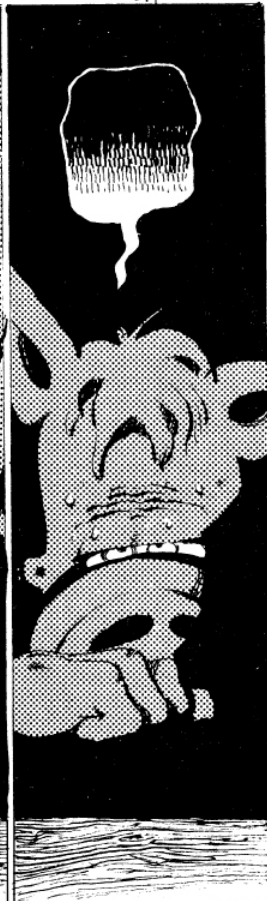
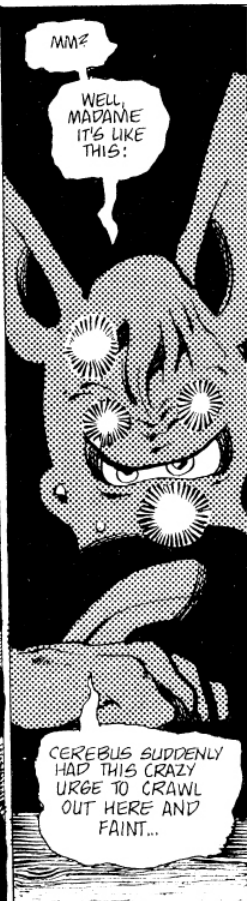
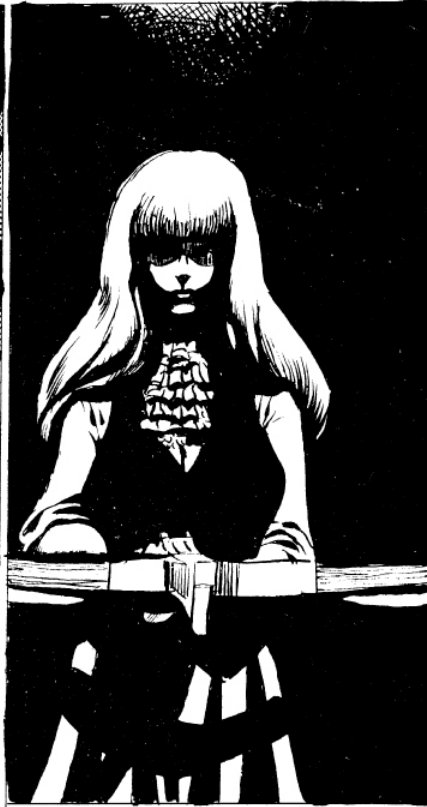
MORE'S
THE
PITY...

I DO NOT, HOWEVER,
INTEND TO ALLOW SOLDIERS
INTO MY SCHOOL

KATRINA?

ONE...

TWO...





DO YOU GET VISITS LIKE THAT OFTEN?

OFTEN ENOUGH.

I TRY TO GIVE THEM EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO LEAVE QUIETLY...

WE'VE BURIED TWENTY OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS

YOUR DRESSING NEEDS TO BE CHANGED.



I DO HOPE YOU NOW UNDERSTAND HOW PAINFUL IT CAN BE TO DISOBEY ME...

AND THAT IT WILL NOT BE NECESSARY FOR ME TO REMIND YOU AGAIN TO STAY IN BED, M'SIEU...

RIGHT

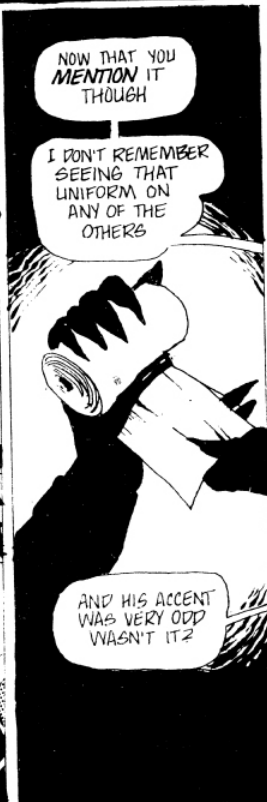
THE SOLDIERS DO NOT COME AS OFTEN AS THEY USED TO. PERHAPS THEIR OFFICERS HAVE GROWN WEARY OF LOSING MEN EVERY TIME OUR AREA OF THE MARSHLANDS HAS BEEN EXPLORED. PERHAPS, TOO, WE HAVE FINALLY BEEN DESIGNATED AS "IMPASSABLE TERRAIN". ON ENOUGH OF THEIR MAPS...I NEVER STOP HOPING THAT EACH NEW SOLDIER IS THE LAST ONE



ARE MOST OF THE THE SOLDIERS YOU ...BURY... SEPRAN --LIKE THAT ONE?

IS THAT WHAT HE WAS, M'SIEU?

I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT MILITARY MATTERS



NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT THOUGH

I DON'T REMEMBER SEEING THAT UNIFORM ON ANY OF THE OTHERS

AND HIS ACCENT WAS VERY ODD WASN'T IT?



SEPRAN!

UNLESS CEREBUS MISSES HIS GUESS, THE LOWER FELDAN GOVERNMENT HAS SIGNED SOME KIND OF AN ACCORD WITH THE SEPRAN EMPIRE ...

...PERMITTING TROOPS TO PASS THROUGH LOWER FELDA ...

...MORE THAN LIKELY TO SMASH THE CIRINIST GOVERNMENT OF UPPER FELDA



BUT IF THIS AREA IS KNOWN TO BE IMPASSABLE TERRAIN...

WHY WOULD THEY PASS THROUGH HERE?

PROBABLY THE TRIBUNAL OF LOWER FELDA GAVE THEM MAPS WITH ALL REFERENCES TO THE MARSHLANDS DELETED...

HOPING THE EMPEROR WOULD LOSE A LEGION OR TWO IN THE MUCK



BUT CEREBUS CAN GUARANTEE YOU THAT EVERY INCH OF COUNTRYSIDE AROUND HERE IS FROZEN *SOLID*...

THEY WON'T LOSE A SINGLE MAN...



AND YOU BELIEVE THAT THIS SHOULD WORRY US?

WELL THAT DEPENDS



HOW WORRIED ARE YOU GOING TO BE BY SIXTEEN THOUSAND SEPRANS MARCHING PAST YOUR SCHOOL?



THAT'S A *CONSERVATIVE* GUESS ON CEREBUS' PART...

IT DEPENDS ON WHETHER THE SEPRANS ARE UNDER-ESTIMATING THE CIRINISTS' MILITARY STRENGTH



MA DIEU.



I MUST SUMMON MY GIRLS-- WE WILL NEED A *PLAN*!



SURE SURE

MAYBE YOU CAN CROCHET SIXTEEN THOUSAND PUP TENTS AND LEAVE THEM ON YOUR FRONT STEP AS A PEACE OFFERING...

...OR BALANCE SIXTEEN THOUSAND FLATIRONS OVER YOUR WINDOWS AND DOORS TO KNOCK THEM OUT IF THEY TRY TO BREAK IN.



I WILL NOT GIVE UP SO EASILY. M'SIEU.



AS HE LISTENS TO THE SOUND OF MADAME DUFORT'S FOOTSTEPS FADING, CEREBUS GLARES BALEFULLY AT HIS LEFT LEG...



LATER...

WELL.

IT IS A GOOD THING
WE HAVE HAD THIS
MUCH WARNING,
NO?

THEY ARE.
ONLY SOLDIERS.

SURELY WE
CAN THINK OF
SOMETHING TO
FOOL THEM.

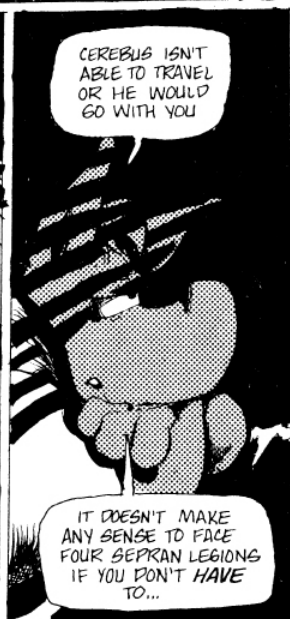


LOOK!

CEREBUS CAN TELL YOU
THE ONLY PLAUSIBLE
COURSE OF ACTION...

YOU JUST HAVE
TO LEAVE-TRY
AND REACH
ONE OF THE
LARGER TOWNS

WHERE YOU'LL
BE SAFE...



CEREBUS ISN'T
ABLE TO TRAVEL
OR HE WOULD
GO WITH YOU

IT DOESN'T MAKE
ANY SENSE TO FACE
FOUR SEPRAN LEGIONS
IF YOU DON'T HAVE
TO...



WHAT ABOUT
A QUARANTINE,
M'SIEU?

SURELY EVEN
SEPRAN SOLDIERS
WOULD AVOID
A PLAGUE-
RIDDEN...



THE SEPRAN
LEGIONS TRAVEL
WITH THEIR
OWN PHYSICIANS

HANG A QUARANTINE
SIGN ON THE DOOR
AND YOU'LL BE HIP-
DEEP IN TONGUE
DEPRESSORS



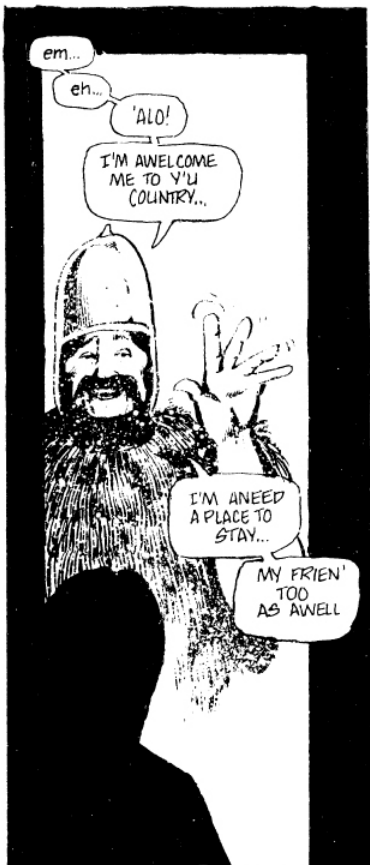
THERE'S NOTHING A SEPRAN
PHYSICIAN LIKES BETTER
THAN SOME HORRIBLY DEFORMED
PLAGUE VICTIM TO PLOKE AND
JAB AND PLUCK AT...

SO UNLESS YOU KNOW
OF A GOOD WAY TO
DEFORM YOUR GIRLS
CEREBUS IS AFRAID
YOUR PLAN WON'T
WORK...

MADAME?

I BELIEVE
I HAVE AN
IDEA.









SERGEAN'?
YOU INNA HE'?

EH! MY FREN'-
FINALL' HE GET
THROUGH DA SNOW.
TIBERIUS!!



I'M ASHOW MY
FREN'-HOKAY?

VERY WELL,
BUT THEN
YOU'LL BOTH
HAVE TO
LEAVE...

DONNA WORRY!
I'M A LIKEA
MY NOSE TO
STAY *THIS*
ASIZE...



'EY TIBERIUS!

Y'U WANNA
TO SEE DA
UGLIEST
LITTLA
GORL...

INNA DA WHOLE
AWIDE A WORL'?

HEE
HEE

UGL' HUH?

SHOO!
SHOO!



I'M A
NO KID
Y'U

Y'U BE LUCK'
NOT ATO LOSE
AY'U LUNCH.

HEEHEE
THISSA SOUND
A PRETT'
GOOD
SERGEAN'



JUST ONE
A LOOK

ANNA THEN
WE LEAVE

THANK
YOU,
M'SIEU

EH?
WASSA
THIS?



TARIM!







I BELIEVE M'SIEU
CEREBUS WOULD LIKE
OUR TWO VISITORS
REMOVED FROM HIS
ROOM

AT THE
EARLIEST
OPPORTUNITY.

YES
MADAME



Cerebus the Aardvark

THE COMING OF SPRING AT MADAME DUFORT'S SCHOOL -- THE THREAT OF SEPRAN SOLDIERS (SEE CEREBUS Nº 23) VANISHES WITH THE SNOW AND ICE AS THE SURROUNDING LAND THAWS INTO MUD AND MARSH... AH, **SPRING** -- WHEN A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY TURNS TO THOUGHTS OF LOVE AND A CERTAIN AARDVARK'S THOUGHTS REMAIN FIXED ON GETTING OUT OF MADAME DUFORT'S SCHOOL IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE...

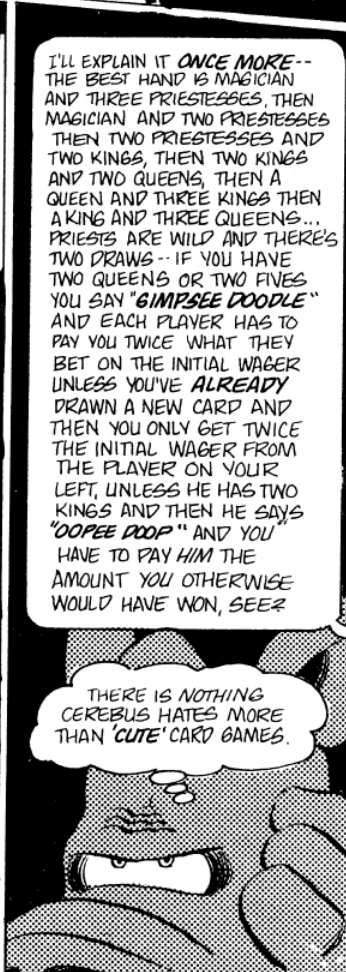
SWAMP SOUNDS

FOR THE MOMENT, THE EARTH-PIG IS FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE WITH **BOREDOM**...

REALLY, THERESA... YOU SHOULD
BUTTON UP YOUR DRESS...
WHAT WOULD MADAME
SAY?...

OH, JANETTE... DON'T
BE SO BLOODY DAMN
TIRESOME....

I DON'T GIVE A
BLOODY DAMN WHAT
MADAME WOULD SAY
...







I SUPPOSE YOU'VE
HAD MANY
ADVENTURES,
M'SIEU?

OH,
KATRINA
...

DON'T BE SO
BLOODY DAMN
THICK...



OF COURSE HE'S
HAD MANY
ADVENTURES

WHY HE'S PROBABLY
SAVED SIMPLY
THOUSANDS OF
WOMEN FROM
DEATH...

HAVEN'T
YOU?



ACTUALLY
NO.

CEREBUS DID
USE ONE FOR A
SHIELD ONCE,
THOUGH.



M'SIEU!
SURELY YOU
JEST!

SHE WAS THE
ONLY ITEM AT
HAND...

OH
MA
DIEU



HAVE YOU NEVER HEARD
OF THE CODE OF HONOUR,
M'SIEU? IT PLAINLY STATES
WOMEN ARE NOT TO BE
HARMED--IN ANY
WAY!



THAT'S WHY
THEY MAKE
THE BEST
SHIELDS



WITH ALL THIS "CODE
OF HONOUR" STUFF,
THEY'RE BETTER
PROTECTION THAN
CHAIN MAIL...



WORKED SO WELL, IN FACT, CEREBUS
HAS BEEN CONSIDERING STRAPPING
A FEW TO HIS HORSE AND TYING
ONE AROUND HIS NECK THE NEXT
TIME HE HAS TO GO INTO BATTLE
...

THERESA!



OH, MA DIEU
--MADAME IS
AWAKE!



YES,
MADAME!

KATRINA?

JANETTE?

AFTER A TIME, THE SOUND FADES. CEREBUS, LOST IN THOUGHT, CONTINUES TO STARE OUT THE WINDOW AT THE DRIVING RAIN...

M'SIEU--
I'VE COME
TO CHECK
THE WOUND
ON YOUR
...

HMM.

WHEN I GAVE
YOU THAT CRUTCH,
I DIDN'T INTEND
FOR YOU TO WEAR
IT OUT...

CEREBUS
WAS
JUST...

RESTING
HERE

THINKING.

SO?

WHAT'S
THE
VERDICT?

I BELIEVE YOU WILL
BE OUR GUEST FOR
ANOTHER WEEK OR SO
...

WHAT?

IT'S BEEN
FOUR WEEKS
ALREADY

BE THAT
AS IT MAY,
M'SIEU
...

IT WAS NOT *I* WHO
ABSENT-MINDEDLY HIT
MY FOOT ON THE
FLOOR TO SIGNAL
THAT MY SUPPER WAS
A FEW MINUTES LATE

PERHAPS IF
YOU COULD THINK
OF A WAY TO
INDICATE YOUR
IMPATIENCE
THAT WAS
LESS...ah...

...DESTRUCTIVE?

CEREBUS' FIRST
IDEA WAS TO
SET FIRE
TO THE
HALLWAY...

AH!

YOU WERE ON
THE RIGHT *TRACK*,
THEN...

WHEN YOU GET
TO THE POINT
WHERE YOU CHOOSE
TO SIMPLY *WAIT*
A FEW EXTRA
MINUTES...

YOU WILL HAVE
MADE *REAL*
PROGRESS

NON?

FOR *NOW*, HOWEVER,
YOU WILL HAVE
ANOTHER WEEK
OR SO...

TO MORE
FULLY DEVELOP
YOUR NEW-FOUND
PATIENCE
...



CEREBUS HAS
HEARD THE
SOUNDS AGAIN
...

I SEE. AND DO YOU
STILL BELIEVE THE
GIRLS AND I ARE
RESPONSIBLE?

YOU MAY FIND THIS
HARD TO BELIEVE
MADAME...

BUT CEREBUS IS **NOW** CONVINCED
THAT SOME MANNER OF SORCERER
OR WIZARD HAS TAKEN AN INTEREST
IN YOUR GIRLS...



AND HAS SENT
SOMEONE...

OR **SOMETHING**

HERE TO
GET THEM



PARDON ME FOR INTERRUPTING,
M'SIEU, BUT THIS STORY IS
RATHER **FAMILIAR**...

THE LAST SOLDIER WHO
STAYED HERE CLAIMED
THERE WERE **WOOD
TROLLS** IN OUR WALLS
...

HE SUGGESTED
THAT I ALLOW
THE GIRLS TO
SLEEP WITH **HIM**
IN HERE

JUST
SO THAT HE COULD
"KEEP A CLOSE WATCH
ON THEM" OF **COURSE**



MADAME.

CEREBUS IS
BEING QUITE
SERIOUS!



HE WAS BEING
QUITE SERIOUS
AS WELL, M'SIEU
...

I SUPPOSE I
SHOULD HEAR
YOU OUT, THOUGH

WHAT ARE YOU
RECOMMENDING
THAT I DO?



KEEP YOUR
GIRLS INDOORS
--**INSIST** THAT
THEY NOT GO
OUTSIDE
AT ALL...

TELL THEM TO
STAY TOGETHER
AS MUCH AS
POSSIBLE

AND ABOVE ALL
THEY SHOULD
NOT INVESTIGATE
ANY STRANGE
SOUNDS
...



THE GIRLS
HAVE A
NUMBER
OF LESSONS
TO DO,
M'SIEU

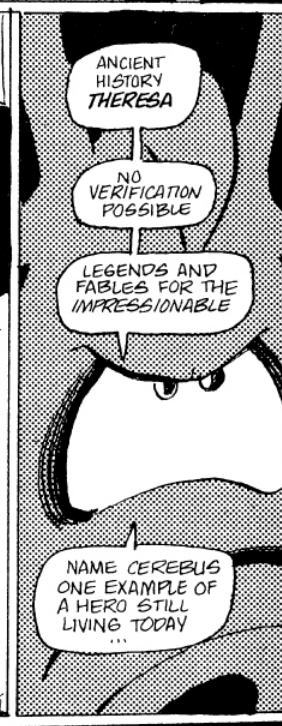
I DOUBT
THEY WILL
HAVE TIME
TO INVESTIGATE
ANYTHING
...



GOOD
NIGHT,
M'SIEU

SLEEP
WELL.

NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME,
CEREBUS WISHES HE COULD
READ THE THOUGHTS LURKING
BEHIND MADAME DUFORT'S
ENIGMATIC HALF-SMILE...





HE DESCENDED INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH UNDER HIS CITY, UNARMED,

THE LEGIONS OF HELL DESCENDED

BUT WITH IRON THEWS AND SLEDGE-HAMMER BLOWS, HE MADE SHORT WORK OF THEM...

IN SEARCH OF THE FOE WHO SOUGHT TO SPOIL HIS PEOPLE'S CELEBRATION OF A MAJOR FESTIVAL...

AND THEN, ACROSS A BRIDGE OF AGED AND CRUMBLING STONES

HE SAW HIS FOE!

THEY LOCKED IN MORTAL COMBAT, POUNDING EACH OTHER WITH BLOWS THAT WOULD HAVE CRUSHED LESSER MEN...

AN ACT OF TRUE HEROISM

AT LAST, HOWEVER, PURITY AND NOBILITY WON THE DAY...

AND HIS BRONZE MUSCLES STREAMING WITH SWEAT, HE WATCHED HIS FOE DIS-APPEAR INTO THE GAPING MAW OF HELL... THE FESTIVAL HAD BEEN SAVED...

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK FOR LORD JULIUS...

THAT'S RIGHT, M'SIEU--THE GRANDLORD OF PALNU!--AND WE HEARD THE WHOLE STORY FROM HIS NIECE ONLY DAYS AFTER IT HAPPENED...

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT?

CEREBUS DOESN'T KNOW QUITE

WHAT

TO SAY...

AND THAT IS ONLY THE FIRST EXAMPLE, M'SIEU...



THE OTHER WAS TOLD TO US **ALL** BY THE LAST SOLDIER TO STAY HERE -- THE SWASHBUCKLING ALBINO BRIGAND **ELROD OF MELVINBONE** WHO STRODE INTO SERREA JUST TWO SUMMERS AGO

AND WITH NAUGHT TO AID HIM SAVE HIS RUNE-CARVED BLACK BLADE **SEERSUCKER**...

BATTLED THE CREAM OF THE EMPEROR'S CITY GUARDS SINGLE-HANDEDLY...

AT TIMES, AS MANY AS A DOZEN SWORDS WERE RAISED AGAINST HIM...

-- THE MINUTES WORE INTO HOURS AND HE FOUGHT ON -- UNTIL AT LAST ALL OF HIS FOES LAY DEAD OR HAD ESCAPED...



FULLY FIVE SCORE SOLDIERS HAD TASTED THE BLACK METAL OF **SEERSUCKER**...



AND DO YOU KNOW THE REASON THIS MOST FEARLESS WARRIOR RISKED HIS LIFE?

CEREBUS COULDN'T IMAGINE...



IT WAS TO SAVE THE LIFE OF A SMALL CHILD IN A RABBIT COSTUME...

AGAIN, M'SIEU

AN ACT OF TRUE **HEROISM**

FOR WHAT ELSE COULD YOU CALL IT?



ACTUALLY, **CEREBUS** CAN THINK OF **SEVERAL** CHOICE DESCRIPTIONS ...

THERESA!

JANETTE

KATRINA

'**HEROISM**' ISN'T ONE OF THEM, THOUGH

WE MUST GO, M'SIEU

TOMORROW WE WILL TALK ABOUT SOME OTHER HERDES, NON?

CEREBUS CAN HARDLY WAIT ...

SLEEP.

SLEEP OF DREAMS.
DREAMS OF THINGS
IN THE BLACKNESS.
REACHING,
GRASPING.

SOUNDS.

LOUDER THAN BEFORE.
SOFT-WET AND GROWING
AS THE BLACKNESS

...CLOSES AROUND
THE EARTH-PIG.

SCHLUCKSCHUMSLUKSHU

A SENSATION OF PULLING.
MUSCLES THAT DON'T
RESPOND THE BLACKNESS!
LIKE BANDS OF IRON
WRAPPING TIGHTLY...

PULLING.

TOWARDS WHAT? TIGHTER
NOW, CHOKING AND CLENCHING

SHLUCKSHTUPSHUK

PULLING.

DOWN.

TOWARDS THE SOUND, SOFT-
WET AND LOUDER STILL...

PULLING THE EARTH-PIG
TOWARDS THE SOUND...

INSIDE, THE
SOUND, INSIDE

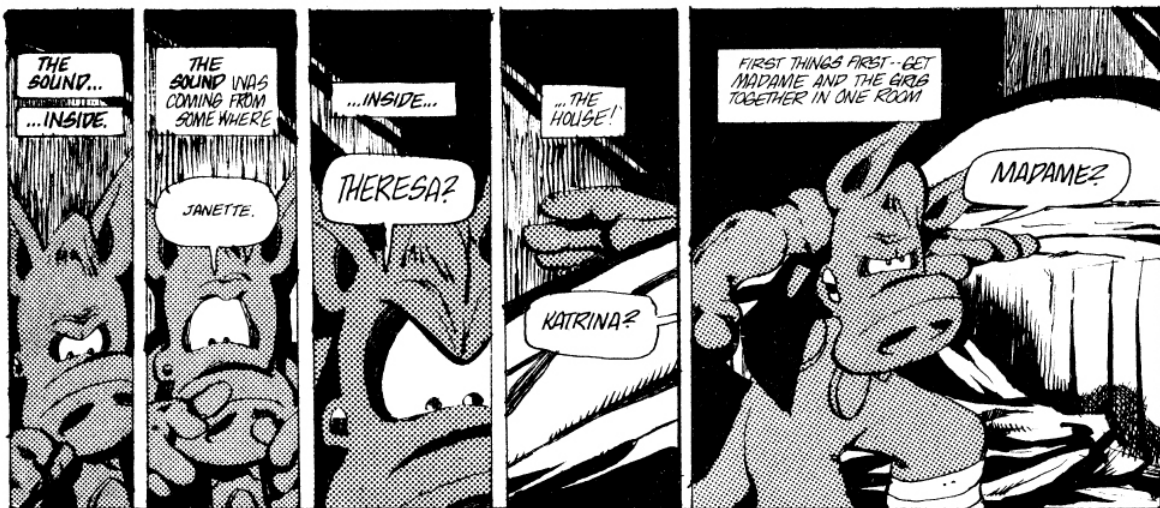
INSIDE THE SOUND INSIDE... THE WORDS ARE A HALF-REMEMBERED REALITY IN THIS WHITE DAZZLE WORLD
OF SOUND IN WHICH THE EARTH-PIG FINDS HIMSELF TUMBLING END OVER END... THE SOUND INSIDE

CEREBUS STRUGGLES TO GRASP THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORDS EVEN AS HIS DESCENT SLOWS AND HE
FINDS HIMSELF FLOATING INSIDE THE SOUND THE SOUND INSIDE INSIDE THE SOUND INSIDE INSIDE

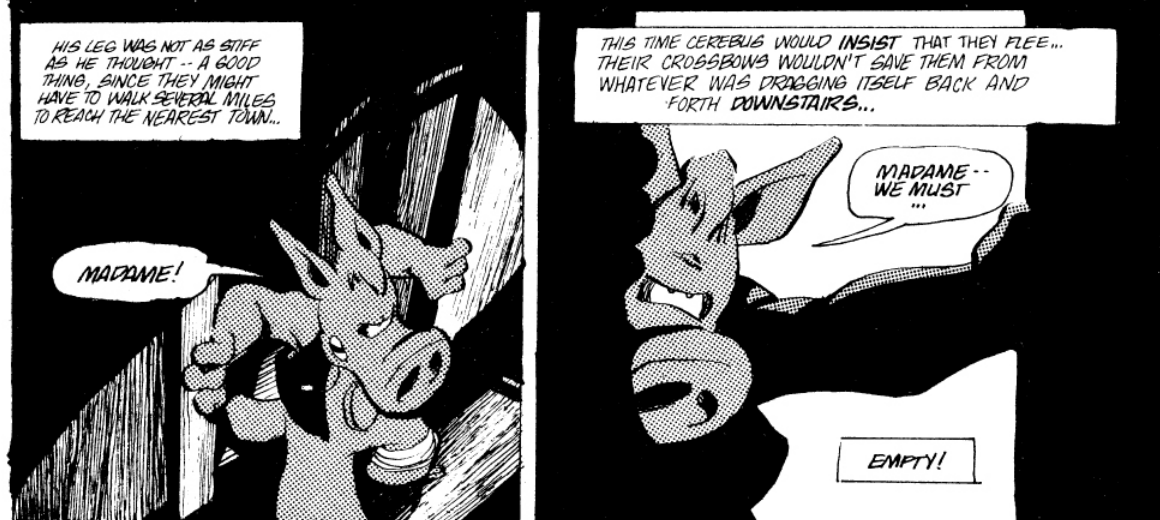
UNTIL FINALLY CEREBUS...

WAKES UP...

...TO FIND...



SHLUCKSHLUKSHUK

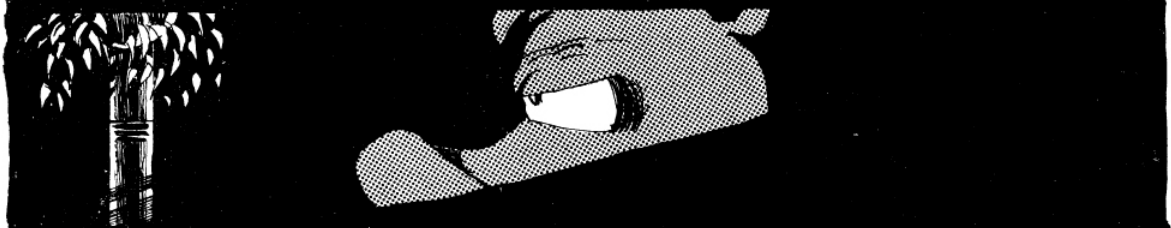


SHLUCKASLUKSLUSHKA



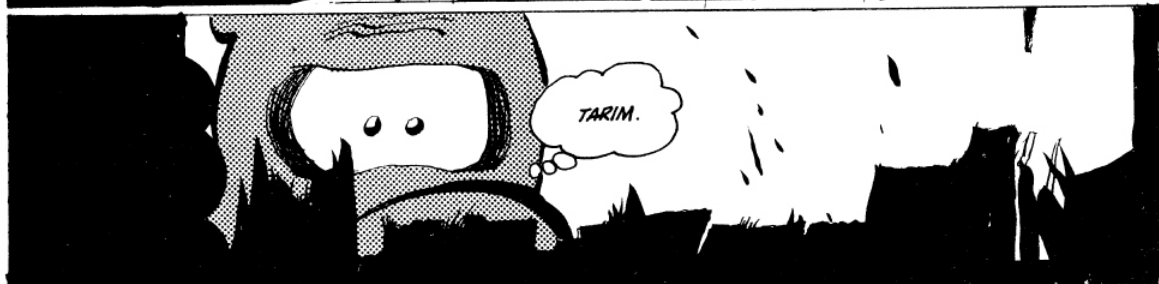


SHLUCKSHUKSHSLUSH



SLUKSHSLUGSHSLUK







UNTIL A VERY SHORT TIME
AGO, I WAS ONE OF A
SELECT GROUP OF ALCHEMISTS
STUDYING IN *RACHINNE*

MY WORK HAD BEEN ADEQUATE
IF UNSPECTACULAR WHEN
I MADE A **REMARKABLE**
DISCOVERY...

QUITE BY
ACCIDENT...



STUDYING THE CHILDREN'S
FABLES WRITTEN BY EUENTUS DO
ALMOST A HUNDRED YEARS
AGO...

I DISCOVERED THAT THEY WERE
IN FACT **ALLEGORIES** FOR VERY
COMPLEX SPELLS AND
INCANTATIONS...



YOU'RE
JOKING.

NOT AT
ALL...

...WHY, IF I COULD FIGURE OUT WHAT THE
PUMPKIN IN THE LAST PARAGRAPH
OF "BLINKY BOAR AND THE STRAWBERRY
PATCH" REPRESENTED, I COULD MAKE
GOLD OUT OF PIG MANURE...



I DID MANAGE TO DECIPHER "OLD BOOBER BEAR
AND THE NASTY HEDGEHOG." IT WAS THE LOST
FORMULA FOR THE CREATION OF THE MYTHIC
APOCALYPSE BEAST

ARMED WITH PO'S BOOK AND MY OWN PRIN-
STAKING RESEARCH, I ADDRESSED A
PANEL OF MY PEERS...



I HAD COMPLETED ONLY THE FIRST FEW SENTENCES OF MY SPEECH
WHEN THE SOUND OF THEIR COLLECTIVE LAUGHTER DROWNED OUT ALL OF
MY ATTEMPTS TO CONTINUE...

THE NEXT DAY I LEFT
VOWING TO RETURN WHEN
I HAD CONJURED AND
HARNESSED THE BEAST



I CAME HERE AND BEGAN MY
SCHOOL... I NEEDED ADOLESCENTS
AS A FOCUS FOR THE SPELL...

I HAND-PICKED THREE
HEALTHY YOUNG MEN,
SCREENING THEM CAREFULLY
FOR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL
ABILITIES...



I HAD INTENTIONALLY SELECTED BOYS FROM WEALTHY FAMILIES, HAVING NO FLINCHES OF MY OWN TO FEED AND HOUSE THREE STUDENTS. THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR WITH UPPER FELDA, HOWEVER, HAD DIMINISHED THEIR INTEREST IN SCHOLASTIC PURSUITS...



...SO I TRIED A SECOND GROUP...

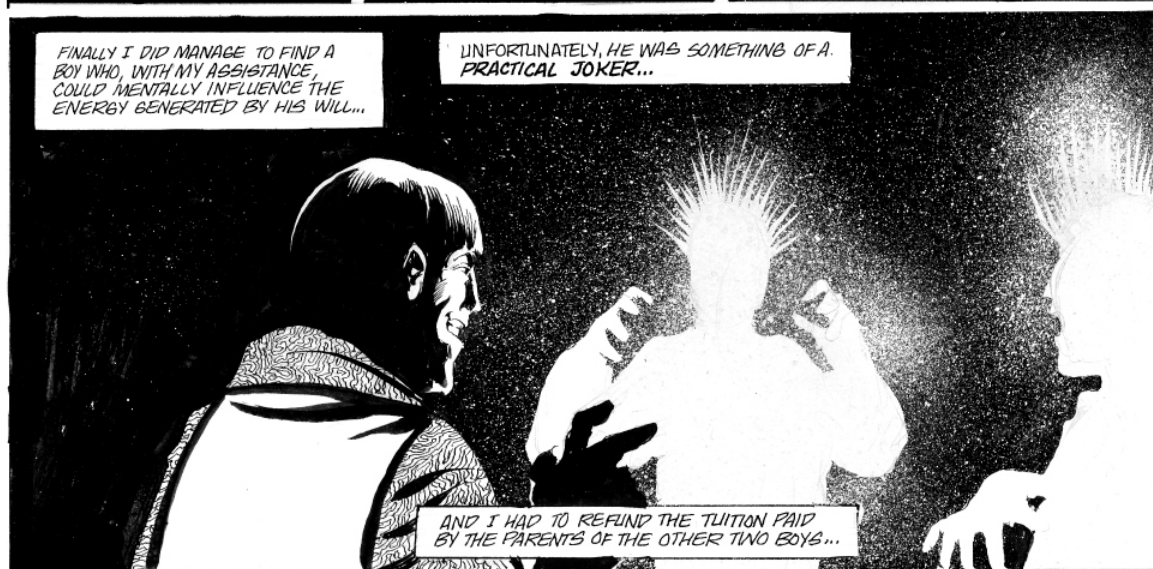


...AND A THIRD...



...AND A FOURTH.

THINGS WENT FROM BAD TO WORSE...



FINALLY I DID MANAGE TO FIND A BOY WHO, WITH MY ASSISTANCE, COULD MENTALLY INFLUENCE THE ENERGY GENERATED BY HIS WILL...

UNFORTUNATELY, HE WAS SOMETHING OF A PRACTICAL JOKER...

AND I HAD TO REFUND THE TUITION PAID BY THE PARENTS OF THE OTHER TWO BOYS...

SO AFTER I GOT
RID OF THE BOY
AND PAID OFF
THE PARENTS,
I WAS BACK
WHERE I
STARTED...

AND
BROKE.

CLEARLY WHAT I
NEEDED WAS THREE
BOYS TO FURNISH THE
ENERGY FOR THE
BEAST

IT WAS THEN THAT I
WAS STRUCK BY AN
INSPIRATION...

WAS THERE ANY REASON
THE BEAST COULDN'T
BE A WOMAN...?

--ITS ENERGY FURNISHED
BY ADOLESCENT GIRLS...?



AND SO I BEGAN MADAME DUFORT'S SCHOOL FOR
GIFTED DEBUTANTES. IT WAS THE PERFECT SOLUTION--
THE DAUGHTERS OF WEALTHY FAMILIES WERE WELL-
MANNERED, USED TO FOLLOWING ORDERS AND EAGER
FOR AN EDUCATION. I CONTACTED SEVERAL...

CEREBUS GETS
THE IDEA...

WEREN'T THEY A
LITTLE SUSPICIOUS
OF YOUR BRAND OF
TEACHING...?

NOT AT ALL-- I JUST TOLD
THEM THAT THEY WERE
PRACTICING THE ESHNOSOPURIAN
COURTING CHANT

EVER SINCE THAT
RIDICULOUS FIVE-DAY
REBELLION

THEY'RE SIMPLY MAD
FOR ANYTHING FROM THAT
DISMAL COASTAL CITY...

CEREBUS
NOTICED
THAT--

IF YOU DON'T MIND,
CEREBUS' LEG HAS
HAD ENOUGH EXERCISE
FOR ONE NIGHT

MAKE YOURSELF
COMFORTABLE

ANYWAY-- WITH THE OCCASIONAL
WAYWARD SOLDIER FOR COMPANY, THE
GIRLS PROGRESSED AT AN ASTONISHING
RATE...

UNTIL NOW THEY ARE IN A
FULL TRANCE-LIKE STATE,
HOLDING THE ENERGIES
BALANCED IN THE CENTER
OF THE CIRCLE

ENERGIES NOW
AT MY COMMAND



SCHLUCKSLUK



Cerebus the Aardvark

SPRINGTIME IN
LOWER FELDA AND
THE RAINS CONTINUE
UNABATED...

...HIS LEG HEALED, CEREBUS
HAS CHOSEN TO ACCOMPANY
PROFESSOR CHARLES X. CLAREMONT
ON HIS MISSION OF REVENGE...

...HIS CURIOSITY ABOUT THE APOCALYPSE BEAST WOMAN-THING AND
PROFESSOR CHARLES X'S PLAN COMPELS HIM TO TAKE THE LONGER
ROUTE TO THE EIGHT BAGS OF GOLD HE HAD HIDDEN BENEATH THE
FLOORBOARDS OF A SMALL FARMHOUSE NEAR FLUROC...*

AS FOR THE PROFESSOR, HE WELCOMES THE OPPORTUNITY TO
EXPLAIN HIS GENIUS MORE FULLY...

* SEE CEREBUS #17

THE LINE OF ENERGY IS MY PSYCHIC
LINK WITH KATRINA, THERESA AND
JANETTE... AS LONG AS IT IS MAINTAINED,
THEY WILL REMAIN IN A STATE OF
SUSPENDED MOTION...

HOW LONG CAN
YOU MAINTAIN IT?

FIVE TO TEN
YEARS WITH NO
LOSS OF STRENGTH
OR CONTROL
...

AND THE GIRLS
ARE NOT HARMED
BY ALL THIS?

QUITE THE CONTRARY...
THEY'RE ENJOYING FIVE
TO TEN YEARS OF DREAMLESS
RELAXED SLEEP...

CEREBUS STILL DOESN'T
UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU
WANT THIS BEAST TO
DO...



THIS WOMAN, THIS THING





THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL IN THIS HEMISPHERE ALONE

THE LAST ONE TO ACHIEVE MASTERY WAS PRINCE GISSE. IN A FIT OF DEPRESSION, HE DECIDED ON THE WORD "ME"

HE WON THE OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FROM THE UNSHIB MORTICIANS' GUILD FIVE YEARS IN A ROW



SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF SENSELESS VIOLENCE TO CEREBUS...

IT COULD BE WORSE YOU KNOW -- SUPPOSE A POLITICIAN HAD ACHIEVED MASTERY?

HE'D LIKELY DECIDE ON A WORD LIKE "POVERTY..."



OR "UNEMPLOYMENT"

IT'S ONE OF THE MORE PLAUSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO URBAN OVER-CROWDING YOU'D HAVE TO ADMIT...

SO WHAT WORD DID YOU DECIDE ON...?



"FEAR"

I FIGURED I COULD ELIMINATE A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION RIGHT AWAY AND GET THE REST WHEN PANIC STARTS TO SPREAD...

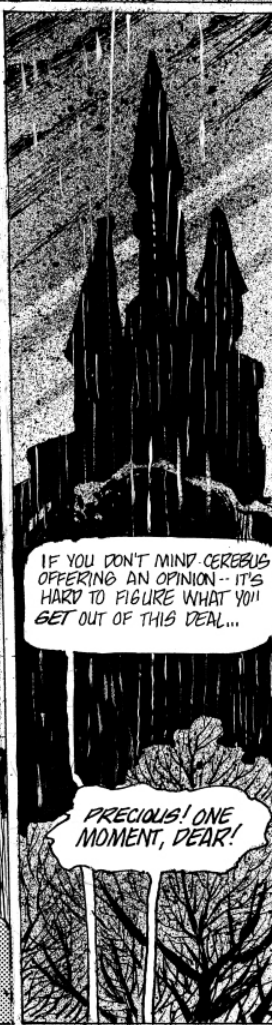
THEN WHY ARE YOU GOING OUT OF YOUR WAY TO GET REVENGE ON YOUR FORMER PEERS?



IT'S SORT OF A TRADITION AMONG THOSE WHO'VE ACHIEVED MASTERY OF THE BEAST...

AN UNCALLED FOR ACT OF SMALL-MINDED AND ACRIMONIOUS VENGEANCE...

JUST TO GET THE WHOLE-SALE SLAUGHTER OF INNOCENTS OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT...



IF YOU DON'T MIND CEREBUS OFFERING AN OPINION -- IT'S HARD TO FIGURE WHAT YOU'VE GOT OUT OF THIS DEAL...

PRECIOUS! ONE MOMENT, DEAR!



...BESIDES A CHANCE
TO WATCH HUMAN BEINGS
REDUCED TO SMOLDERING
ASHES BY YOUR WALKING
EGGPLANT...

A NICE, BIG
HOUSE TO LIVE
IN...

WHAT?



THERE'S NO REAL REASON TO
MAKE THE WHOLE JOURNEY
WITHOUT A REST STOP. BESIDES
IF I'M GOING TO WREAK HAVOC
ON THE COUNTRYSIDE, I'M GOING
TO NEED A PLACE TO UNWIND
AT NIGHT...

THE
CASTLE,
HUH?

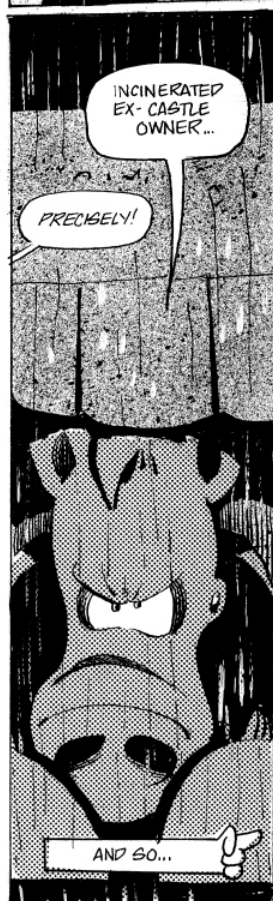
WHAT IF
SOMEONE
LIVES THERE?



WE'LL GO IN **WITHOUT** WOMAN-
THING-- IF WE COME ACROSS
SOMEONE, WE'LL TELL HIM
THERE'S A HORRIBLE MONSTER
THAT CHASED US RIGHT UP TO
HIS FRONT GATE...

HE'LL TAKE ONE
LOOK AT HER --
BECOME PARALYZED
WITH **FEAR**
AND...

FFFT!



INCINERATED
EX- CASTLE
OWNER...

PRECISELY!

AND SO...



HOW MUCH
FARTHER IS
IT?

WE'RE ALMOST HALFWAY...
THINK OF ALL THE EXCITEMENT
WHEN STORIES ABOUT WOMAN-
THING START BECOMING
WIDE-SPREAD...

ANGRY MOBS OF FRIGHTENED
VILLAGERS WITH TORCHES
AND PITCHFORKS SCREAMING
FOR MY BLOOD...

...LED BY LOCAL
PRIESTS WITH
WOODEN STAKES
AND GARLIC-
FLAVORED HOLY
WATER...

OH HOW
I LOVE BEING
EVIL!



WE'LL HIDE WOMAN-THING
JUST INSIDE THE GATE
WHILE WE CHECK OUT
THE GROUND FLOOR FOR
THE SOON-TO-BE-LATE
OWNER...

AND FOR ANY ODD
BOTTLES OF ALE
WE MIGHT FIND
"



A DRINK -- NOT A
BAD THOUGHT BUT
FIRST THINGS
FIRST...

PRECIOUS OVER
THIS WAY -- WE
HAVE TO HIDE
YOU, DEAR...

MAGNIFICENT -- A DEFINITE
RELIC OF THE BLACK TOWER
PERIOD! MOST SATISFACTORY
FOR MY PURPOSES...



WE'LL BRING HIM BACK
THIS WAY WITH US
DISTRACTING HIM UNTIL
HE'S BARELY A FOOT
AWAY FROM WOMAN-
THING

AND I'LL INSTRUCT
HER TO GRAB HIM
BY THE THROAT...

IF THAT DOESN'T
MAKE HIM JUMP OUT
OF HIS SKIN,
NOTHING WILL...



I'LL BE DOING HIM A
FAVOUR, ACTUALLY --
HE PROBABLY WOULDN'T
CARE FOR THE CHANGES
I INTEND TO MAKE...



WONDERFUL

GREAT
WORKMANSHIP



I'M
IMPRESSED.

I REALLY
AM...



ALL THE *DETAIL*
ON THE HANDS...
EVERY *TENDON*...

AMAZING.

NOT A
SEAM
SHOWING



WELL?

CEREBUS
HASN'T SEEN
HIM JUMP
OUT OF HIS
SKIN, YET.



NOBODY LIKES
A SMART GUY
AARDVARK...

I'M
VERY
PLEASED



IT LOOKS LIKE
...*MUD*... OR
SLIME OR
SOMETHING
FROM A
DISTANCE
...

YOU'D ALMOST
SWEAR IT
WAS *ALIVE*
WOULDN'T
YOU...?



I'VE TAKEN
JUST ABOUT
ALL OF THIS
I *INTEND*
TO TAKE...

WHAT ARE YOU GOING
TO *DO*? *ORDER* HIM
TO BE FRIGHTENED?



I AM FAR
FROM *HELPLESS*
AARDVARK...

IF HE THINKS
WOMAN-THING
IS LIFE-LIKE
NOW...

LET'S SEE
HOW HE FEELS
ABOUT...

...THIS!!



I'VE GOT A PATRON WHO WOULD GIVE YOU THE KEYS TO HIS MISTRESS' CHASTITY BELT FOR A PIECE OF WORK LIKE THIS ...

LOVES ALL THIS NEW **WEIRD** STUFF ...

NOT INTO IT MYSELF ...



HE'S **IMPRESSED**, CLAREMONT

MAYBE YOU SHOULD **SETTLE** FOR THAT.

THIS IS THE **APOCALYPSE BEAST**

NOT SOME CLEVER PIECE OF CLOCK-WORK...

IF HE DOESN'T KNOW ENOUGH TO BE **TERRIFIED**, THEN I SHALL HAVE TO **TEACH** HIM!

IT MUST HAVE TAKEN YOU **YEARS** TO LOCATE...



MY BUTLER WILL PREPARE TWO ROOMS ...

AND YOU CAN LET ME KNOW HOW MUCH YOU WANT FOR THE --uh

THING.



I'D KILL MYSELF BEFORE I'D SELL WOMAN-THING ...

OHO! A **COLLECTOR**!

SORRY, FRIEND-- I HAD YOU PEGGED AS AN **IMPORTER** OR A **DEALER**...



WELL, EVEN **BETTER**...

WE CAN TALK ABOUT OUR **COLLECTIONS**...

I'LL GET SOME **WINE** ...



WHY DON'T YOU JUST ACCEPT HIS OFFER AND STAY HERE AS HIS **GUEST**?

NO!

THERE HAS TO BE **SOME WAY** TO **FRIGHTEN** HIM...

THINK!

THINK.

THINK.





BACK AGAIN ...

I BROUGHT MY THREE LATEST CANVASSES, IN CASE YOU'RE INTO IT...



THINK.

THINK.



THIS IS MY FIFTH VERSION OF THIS PAINTING... IT'S LIKE... AN ALLEGORY, RIGHT? THE MONSTER REPRESENTS THE TEMPTATION OF EVIL THOUGHTS...

THE GIRL REPRESENTS THE BASIC WICKEDNESS OF HUMANITY...

AND HER BREASTS FALLING OUT OF HER DRESS REPRESENT THE DILEMMA FACING THE INDIVIDUAL

I SOLD THE FIRST FOUR VERSIONS TO A MONASTERY...



IN THIS PAINTING, THE GIRL CHAINED TO A WALL REPRESENTS THE REPPRESSED NATURE OF THE ORTHODOX TARIMITES MIND

HERE THE BREASTS REPRESENT THE INNER CONFLICT BETWEEN LUST AND ABSTINENCE

CONSEQUENTLY, THEY ARE A GOOD DEAL LARGER THAN THE BREASTS IN THE OTHER PAINTING...

I'VE SOLD AROUND FIFTY OF THESE...



I HAVE IT!



I'VE COME UP WITH A PLAN... I'M GOING TO HAVE WOMAN-THING PICK HIM UP AND HOLD HIM OVER THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF BY ONE HAND...

THE MOMENT HE PANICS, HE'LL BE QUICK-FRIED...

ASK HIM WHERE HE KEEPS THE REST OF THE LIQUOR, FIRST...



THIS ONE IS FOR A TREASURY EXECUTIVE IN PALNU. HERE THE BREASTS REPRESENT THE CONFLICT BETWEEN SHORT-TERM PROFIT GOUGING AND NEST-EGG MERCANTILE BANKING...

UNFORTUNATELY, I DIDN'T LEAVE ROOM FOR THE GIRL'S HEAD...

HE TOLD ME TO NOT WORRY ABOUT IT.



YOU CAN'T BEAT BREASTS WHEN IT COMES TO UNIVERSAL SYMBOLS...



I DID BOWLS OF FRUIT FOR YEARS -- YOU EVER TRY USING RIPE BREAD- FRUIT TO ILLUSTRATE MAN'S INABILITY TO REACH HARMONY WITH HIS ENVIRONMENT...?

IT DOESN'T WORK -- BUT BREASTS! BREASTS WORK! THE FIRST THING PEOPLE ASK IS "WHAT IS THIS? BREASTS?"

YOU SEE? BREASTS OPEN UP A DIALOGUE! THERE IS A NEED TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT BREASTS...

THEIR FIRST QUESTION IS "WHAT IS THIS?"



FORTUNATELY FOR MY BANK ACCOUNT, THEIR SECOND QUESTION IS GENERALLY "CAN YOU DO ONE OF THOSE FOR ME?"

BREASTS ARE EVEN MORE POPULAR THAN MONSTERS! BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT ANY ARTIST WHO IS NOT PUTTING BREASTS IN HIS PAINTINGS IS CUTTING HIMSELF OFF FROM EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE ART-CONSUMING PUBLIC...

I THINK IT'S ONLY FAIR TO TELL YOU THAT WOMAN-THING IS ABOUT TO...



...UH?



DOWN, PRECIOUS!

PUT HIM, DOWN!

THE MONSTER IN THAT PAINTING YOU'RE HOLDING...

WHAT ABOUT IT?

WHERE DID YOU GET THE IDEA FOR IT?



WHO? HIM?

THAT'S
FILBERT.

...MY TWELVE-FOOT
GREEN ART
OBJECT...

HE'S UPSTAIRS WITH
THE REST OF MY
REFERENCE COLLECTION



WHEN I BOUGHT
THE PLACE, THEY
THREW HIM IN
ALONG WITH A
SHOWER CURTAIN
AND A BENT
SAUCE-PAN...

THEN I SUGGEST
WE ALL GO
UPSTAIRS.



OH,
SURE!

I WANT TO GET
YOUR OPINION
ON MY SEPRAN
BEADWORK...

BRING HIM
WITH YOU,
PRECIOUS



IT REALLY IS VERY
NICE OF YOU - DROP-
PING BY LIKE THIS

I'VE BEEN SPENDING
MORE TIME WITH MY
COLLECTION LATELY
TRYING TO GET AN
IDEA FOR ANOTHER
THEME FOR MY
NEXT PAINTING

SOMETHING MORE
THAN BREASTS OR
MONSTERS...



NOT THAT I
HAVE ANYTHING
AGAINST BREASTS
YOU UNDERSTAND

I JUST FIGURE
IT'S TIME FOR
ME TO SET MY
SIGHTS A LITTLE
HIGHER...

...SO TO
SPEAK.



HE HAS NO **CONCEPTION**
OF HOW UTTERLY
STUPID HE IS...

HE LOOKS ON THIS...
"FILBERT"... AS JUST
ONE MORE PIECE IN HIS
FOOLISH COLLECTION...

IT'S THE DOUBLE
DOORS AT THE TOP
OF THE STAIRS...

YOU THINK
IT'S SOMETHING
ELSE?

IF THAT PAINTING IS AN
ACCURATE COPY, THERE IS
ONLY **ONE** THING "FILBERT"
COULD BE...

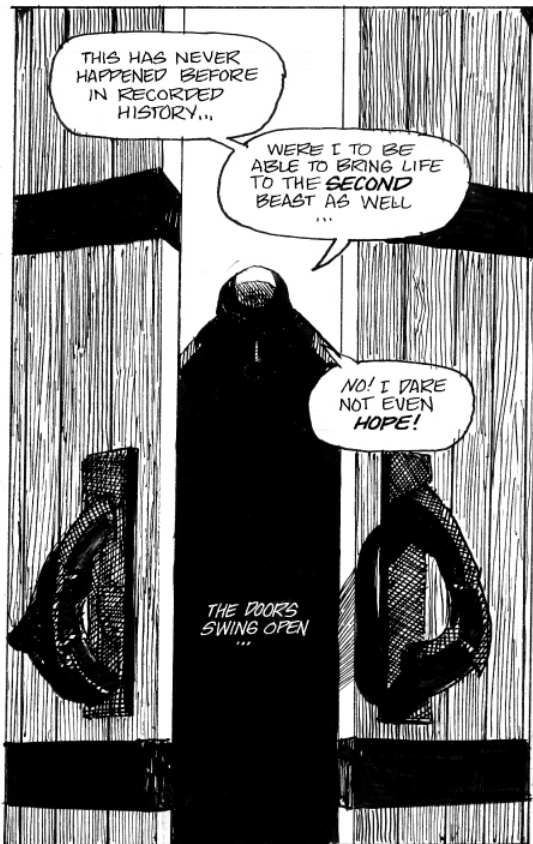
... LORD ROTH-SLUMP'S
ORIGINAL APOCALYPSE
BEAST!



CERESUS THOUGHT
THESE BEASTS WERE
SOMETHING OF A
RARITY...

EITHER THEY'RE
HAVING A SUDDEN
POPULATION
EXPLOSION OR...

RARE?
OF COURSE
THEY'RE
RARE!

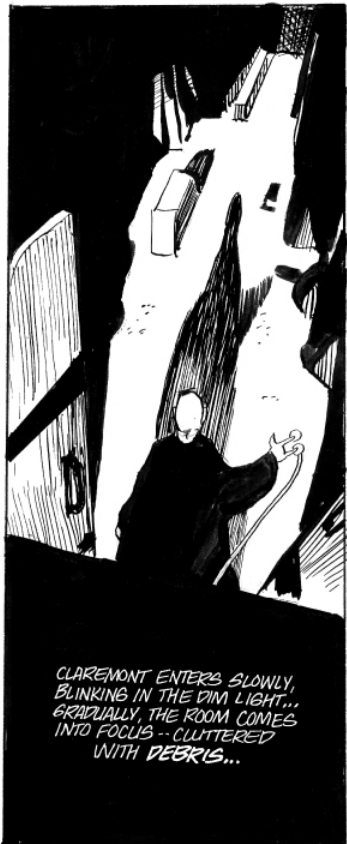


THIS HAS NEVER
HAPPENED BEFORE
IN RECORDED
HISTORY...

WERE I TO BE
ABLE TO BRING LIFE
TO THE **SECOND**
BEAST AS WELL
...

NO! I DARE
NOT EVEN
HOPE!

THE DOOR'S
SWING OPEN
...



CLAREMONT ENTERS SLOWLY,
BLINKING IN THE DIM LIGHT...
GRADUALLY, THE ROOM COMES
INTO FOCUS -- CLUTTERED
WITH **DEBRIS**...



AS IF OF ITS OWN VOLITION,
A THIN BAND OF ENERGY
LEAPS FROM HIS RIGHT HAND
INTO THE ROOM...



A SMALL MASS OF
CRUDELY SHAPED
STONE IS SUDDENLY
OUTLINED IN LIGHT



TWO CREASES OF
WHITE FORM ON THE
SURFACE OF THE
MASS...



...AND IT BEGINS
TO LURCH TOWARD
THE INTRUDERS...



THE EARTH-PIG BLINKS SEVERAL TIMES AS HE RISES! IN THE DIM LIGHT, ONE OF THE LARGER FRAGMENTS APPEARS TO...



...MOVE!



SMACK



CEREBUS?

uh...

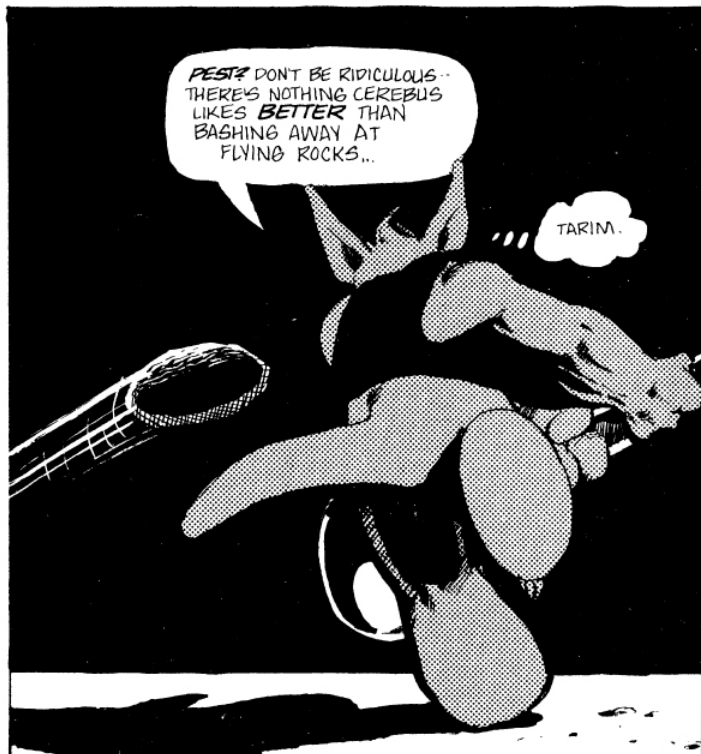


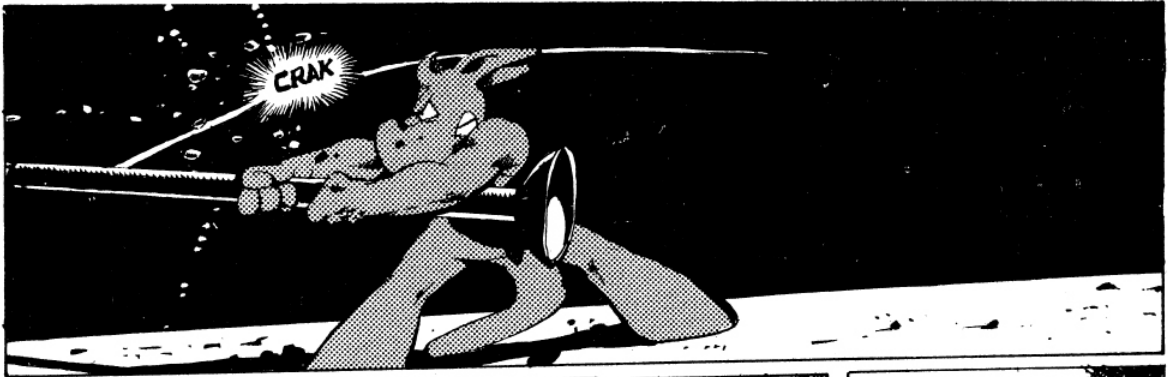
I HATE TO SEEM LIKE A PEST...



PEST? DON'T BE RIDICULOUS-- THERE'S NOTHING CEREBUS LIKES **BETTER** THAN BASHING AWAY AT FLYING ROCKS...

TARIM.





SUMP THING









SPLAT

GAA

HEY-- SORRY
I TOOK SO
LONG-- I FORGOT
THAT I HAD
CATALOGUED
THE BEADWORK
AT THE SAME
TIME AS MY
FOREIGN COINS
AND THE
SYSTEM WAS ...



OH,
WOW!



THAT'S
IT!



SPLUP

LIMPH!

THAT'S THE THEME I'VE BEEN
LOOKING FOR-- "MAN, THE
ETERNAL INNOCENT"



"...BATTERED, BUMPED AND
BRUISED BY FORCES BEYOND
HIS CONTROL...."



ALL THAT AND ENORMOUS GREEN
BREASTS AS WELL! THE ART-
BUYING PUBLIC WILL LOVE IT!



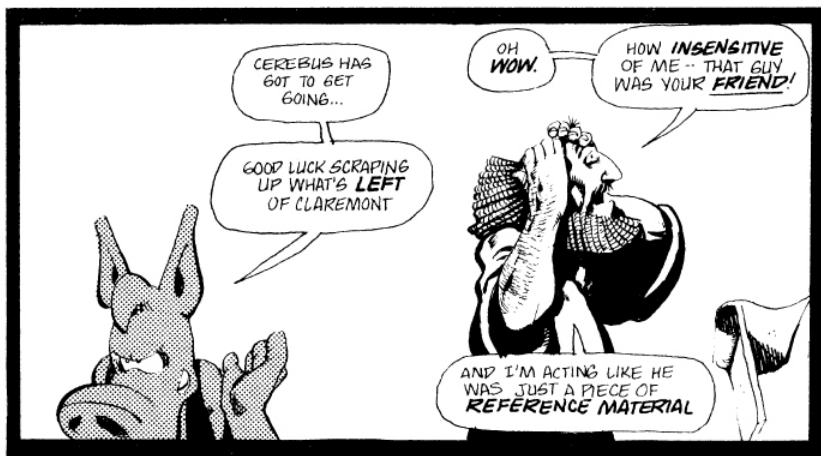
RAR

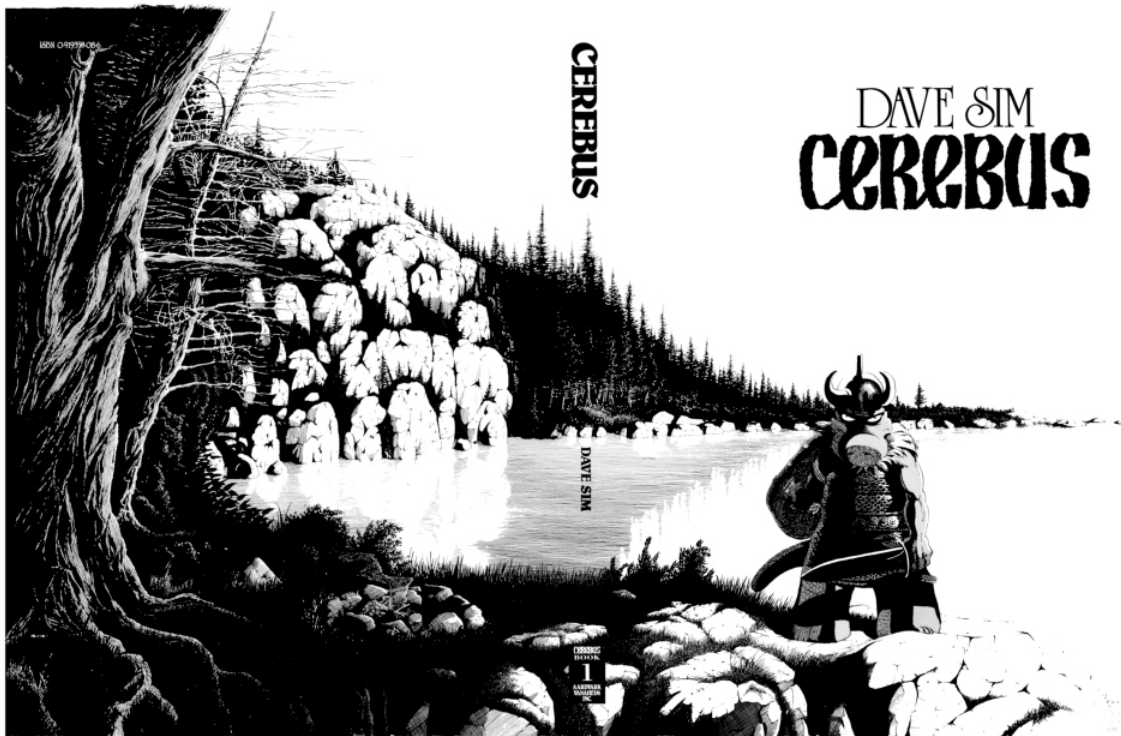


MWR

MY SKETCHBOOK!
WHERE IS MY
SKETCHBOOK...







NOTE ON THE 16TH PRINTING OF CEREBUS VOLUME ONE

This printing marks the first time that I've directed fundamental corrections and restorations to be made to the original material since first producing it more than thirty years ago, a choice precipitated by George Gatsis making me aware of flaws which resulted from the conversion of the original photographic negatives to digital files several years ago (itself made necessary by the worldwide computer revolution which eliminated the possibility of continuing to print the trade paperbacks via the traditional negative/metal plate web offset printing form).

I have been advocating for some time that publishers of classic comic strips should be updating each successive printing of their collections with high quality scans from original artwork (which have surfaced in the interim) and came to the conclusion that I needed to "practice what I preached".

[I had tended not to because, frankly, I didn't think my earliest artwork on Cerebus warranted it. I was an enthusiastic amateur or -- at best -- a semi-professional and find it very hard to look at the work at all closely. So, I've pretty much just approved each successive printing after no more diligent checking than to make sure all the pages are in the right order.]

George Gatsis (GeorgePeterGatsis.com) developed the CEREBUS PAGES IN THE WILD program (CerebusDownloads.com) to try to track down as many original pages as still exist and to which we could gain access. A complete list of the original pages incorporated into the 16th printing appears following this note.

Depending on the page, the reproduction has been modified digitally to provide for greater or lesser contrast and brightness. Page 541 is a good example of lesser contrast where the original brush strokes in the areas of solid black are now visible while leaving the black solid enough to keep the effect from distracting the casual reader. Light shadings of the original pencil -- never properly erased, a recurrent flaw of mine -- on Sump Thing's features are likewise retained. It's much closer in appearance to the original artwork, in other words.

Partway between greater and lesser contrast, we have the background greys on pages 527, 529 and 530 which were produced by means of "spatter" -- loading up a toothbrush with india ink and flick flick flicking it over the surface after masking off all the areas that needed to remain white -- the "poor man's airbrush". Just looking at the exponentially higher reproduction which has resulted from the digital scanners ability to "see" and translate these effects into 0's and 1's and to retain them with 100% accuracy in the printing stage as compared with the same effect on the surrounding contemporaneous pages derived from the original photographic negatives...well, it gives you a good idea of why we hope that more artwork still exists from that issue and can be located at some point.

All of the digital scanning from original source materials for the volume was performed by Alana Wilson at 1200 dpi or higher under George Gatsis' direction and then George himself "tweaked" each digital file for the greatest possible coherence, to make sure all detail was brought out as clearly as possible. A copy was then printed out for me of the digital files so that I could offer further guidance where a page, in my view, had gone too dark or too light.

Some limited restoration has also been performed by George. Limited in the sense that none of the actual drawings have been in any way modified but purely mechanical flaws have been corrected. As an example, where holes or breaks have occurred in the 30% mechanical tone that was used on Cerebus, and where the break doesn't appear overtop of an actual ink line (which would necessitate recreating a 1981 ink line in 2012), neighbouring 30% dots have been digitally cloned and imported to the area in question under high-powered magnification so they could be matched up seamlessly.

Panel and caption borders which had broken up or faded have, likewise, been restored by digitally "cloning" the lines that remain and grafting them directly onto the empty areas. This has been avoided with the word balloons which are not composed of straight lines and which I, therefore, consider part of the artwork which can't be successfully restored because I don't draw them that way anymore. 2012 Dave Sim can't "do" 1981 Dave Sim or "correct" 1981 Dave Sim without superseding him, so 2012 Dave Sim is keeping his pen and ink to himself.

The Cerebus logo on page one was imported and reversed to white from a period logo rather than trying to restore the second-generation photographic negative shot from an already degraded photostat.

The only other form of restoration which I have authorized (and which, arguably, can be considered "borderline" defacement) is the restoration of the original lettering where that has faded by "cloning" adjacent letters and substituting them for their missing counterparts. It's at least "borderline" defacement because the "D" that you see is not the specific "D" that I put in place thirty-five years ago. However, weighing in the balance the resulting improved coherence and readability, I tend to think that there is great validity in the "trade-off". The lettering on page 206, as an example, has been a thorn in my side since issue 9 first came in with the page in this same degraded form -- and which turned out to be a flaw in the negative itself, a fact which I didn't discover until after I had already sold the original page. The white gaps in the patterned ink hatching in the background of each panel might be the next thing "fixed" in the 17th printing but I haven't decided if it would constitute a lesser or greater form of borderline defacement if the few areas that have reproduced well are cloned and "wallpapered" or if I did fill in the blanks by hand (the pattern is pretty basic and can't be done in a substantially different way even by Old Geezer Dave). Or, with any luck, that page will come IN FROM THE WILD before the 17th printing becomes necessary.

Many thanks to George and Alana for their tireless work on this volume. If you own any of the original pages from the first 25 issues which don't appear on George's list, please see his specifications which follow the list and, if it all possible, help us to "swap out" one more second generation copy for a first generation one.

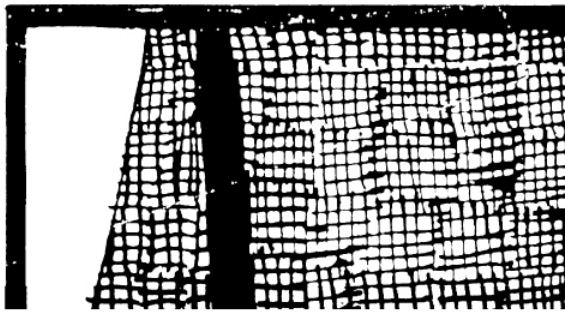
Dave Sim
Kitchener, Ontario
14 December 12

LIST OF ORIGINAL CEREBUS VOLUME ONE ART.

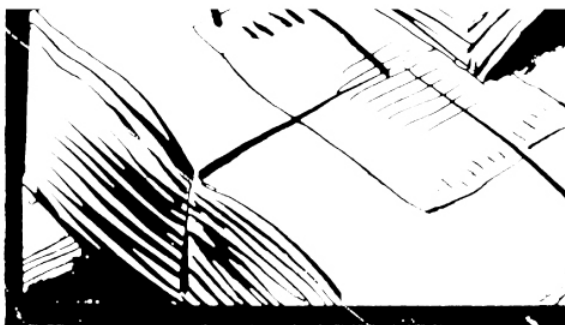
PAGE #	ISSUE # & PAGE #	COURTESY OF	CONTACT	SUBMITTED BY
13	c01 p05	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
14	c01 p06	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
18	c01 p10	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
22	c01 p14	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
23	c01 p15	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
27	c01 p19	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
39	c02 p09	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
44	c02 p14	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
119 to 140	c06 p01 to p22	Comic Link	Comiclink.com	Douglas Gillock
146	c07 p06	Comic Connect	Comicconnect.com	(taken from the website)
156	c07 p16	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
255	c12 p05	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
275	c13 p03	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
296 to 298	c14 p01 to p03	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
300 to 303	c14 p05 to p08	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
339	c15 p13	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
367	c17 p01	Bob Bretall	Bob Bretall	Bob Bretall
368	c17 p02	Heritage Auctions	HA.com	(taken from the website)
393	c18 p07	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
395	c18 p09	Comic Connect	Comicconnect.com	(taken from the website)
408	c19 p02	Comic Connect	Comicconnect.com	(taken from the website)
417	c19 p11	Comic Connect	Comicconnect.com	(taken from the website)
431	c20 p05	Comic Connect	Comicconnect.com	(taken from the website)
435	c20 p09	Comic Connect	Comicconnect.com	(taken from the website)
448	c21 p02	Comic Connect	Comicconnect.com	(taken from the website)
457	c21 p11	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
485	c22 p19	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
507	c24 p01	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
510	c24 p04	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
515	c24 p09	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
517	c24 p11	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
522	c24 p16	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive
523	c24 p17	Cerebus Archive	George Peter Gatsis	Cerebus Archive

Check CerebusDownloads.com for the most up to date list and examples of the reconstruction process.

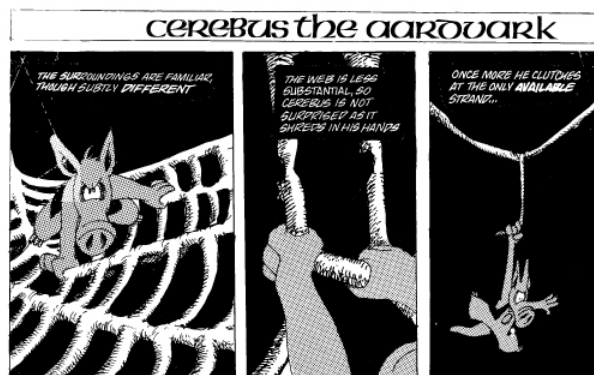
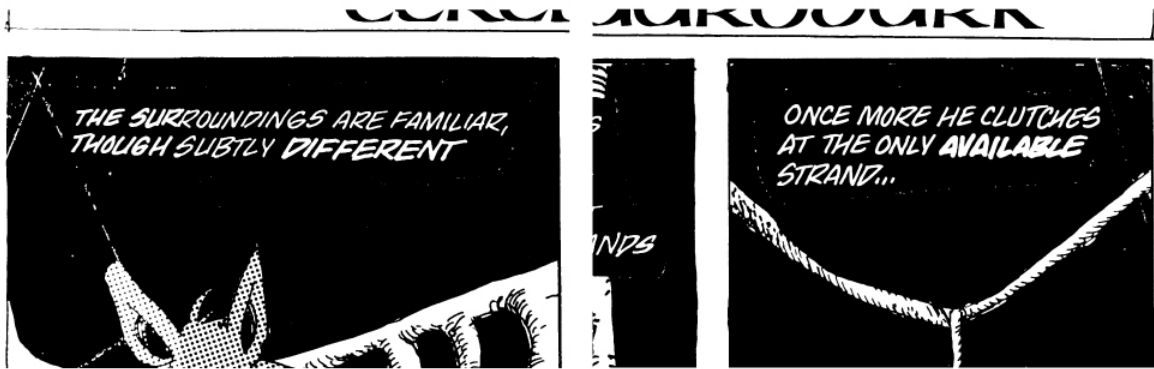
Example of the damage which most of volume one film negatives had. The pages were kept in position on the "flats" by tape. You can see the outline of the rectangular tape on the 4 corners of this page.



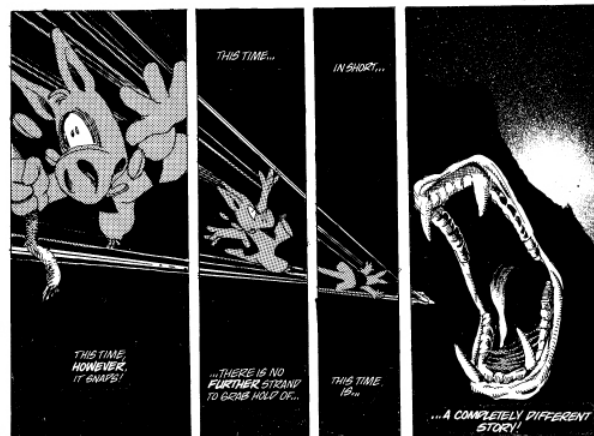
454



Here is another example of the damaged area that the tape caused on a film negative.



day of the earth-pig!



163

And here is a before of the very first page of Cerebus. The Damage was very extensive on the corners and within the page. Examples: the logo and a scratch on the second panel, near the man's eye.



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CEREBUS

DAVE SIM

CEREBUS
BOOK
1
AARDVARK
VANAHHEIM
INC.

